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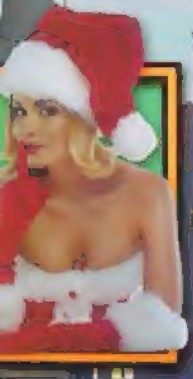

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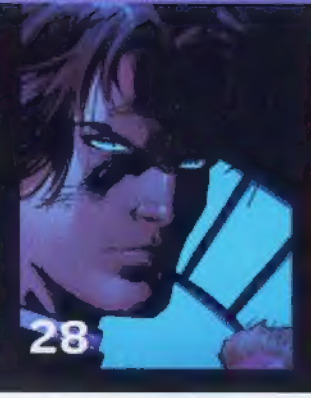

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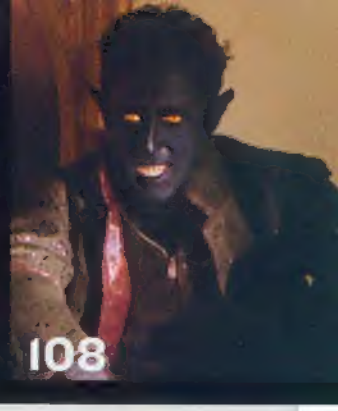
the covers

JLA (left), the final piece of a three-part mega cover by Alex Ross, sets the stage for our **Uncensored Alex Ross Fan Q+A on p. 62.** Ultimate Spider-Man, Thing and Wolverine (center) leads into our **Ultimate FF Preview on p. 68.** Wolverine (right) drags you six feet under for our chat with *Wolverine: The End* scribe **Paul Jenkins on p. 58.**



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HOLLYWOOD HOTSHOTS

Talk about your star power.

For this issue's mega Hollywood Roundtable Q&A (p. 84), we've assembled an all-star team of production talent responsible for some of the biggest and best comic book movie and TV adaptations ever created. Get a load of the lineup we've wrangled for you:

Writer/director **David S. Goyer** *(JSA)*, who's penned the scripts for "Blade" and "Blade 2," talks about directing "Blade: Trinity" and scripting "Batman 5" for director Christopher Nolan ("Insomnia"); **Alfred Gough and Miles Millar** discourse on putting together the adventures of a young Clark Kent on the WB's "Smallville"; **Tom DeSanto**, producer X-traordinaire who gave the X-film franchise all the fanboy tidbits needed to make the transition to the big screen, gives us insights on putting "X-Men 3" together; and last but certainly not least, **Marvel Studios President Avi Arad**, the man spearheading every single movie project for the House of Ideas, gives readers the scoops on all the ins and outs of getting a superhero project off the ground and into cineplexes worldwide!

That's a Hollywood spectacle if there ever was one fanboys and girls, so grab your two-ton tub of popcorn, your 40-gallon soda and make your way down the red carpet for the true celebrity treatment! Enjoy!

Sincerely,

Gareb S. Shamus

BYTHENUMBERS...

35 Length, in feet, of the stretch Navigator rented for Associate Editor Jesse Thompson's bachelor party

40 Minutes that Staff Writer Mike Cotton "disappeared" in private curtain area of adult entertainment club visited by the aforementioned bachelor party

15 Minutes before any of the bachelor party attendees realized Associate Editor Alex Segura Jr. had been left behind at the club

1 Lucky Wizard staffer who got the number of an exotic dancer from the club!

534 Number of questions Alex Ross fans submitted to wizarduniverse.com for the Q&A on p. 62

23 Number of questions that made the final cut

8 Number of Wizard staffers celebrating 10 years of service with the company. Congratulations, guys!

10 Minutes it took for someone to start drinking beer the morning of the picnic (it's the breakfast of champions!)

9,000 Number of bees swarming around the soda fountain at said company picnic

3 Number of times Staff Writer Richard Ho won playing HORSE at the company picnic

16 Number of hours Associate Editor Jesse Thompson was on set of "The Punisher" so he could be an extra

0 Number of scenes shot with Thompson that day

masthead

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WIZARD: THE COMICS MAGAZINE, volume one, issue one hundred forty-six (#146), December 2003.
Please direct all editorial-related inquiries to Wizard Editorial Dept., 151 Wells Avenue, Congers, NY 10920-2064
For the [illegible] Please address all [illegible] c/o Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Avenue, Congers, NY 10920. One-year subscription rate is $29.95 (Canada $40.00, all other countries $70.00). All payments in U.S. funds only.

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WIZARD: THE COMICS MAGAZINE (ISSN 1065-9468) is published monthly by Gareb Shamus Enterprises Inc. D.B.A. Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY 10920-2064. Periodical postage paid at Congers, NY and additional mailing offices. [illegible] Postmaster: Send address changes to WIZARD ENTERTAINMENT [illegible]

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'JLA/Avengers' kicks ass... Angry Scandinavians... & Magic Words' 'New Guy'

What the hell have I gotten myself into? That's the question!—Richard Ho, humble staff writer for this wacky magazine—have been whispering to myself over sleepless nights for the past few weeks. You see, now that we've finally cattle-prodded those pesky interns who've been running around answering letters for the past three months, I've been asked—nay, suckered—into taking over the column held for so long by that wisecracking Minnesotan, Jim McLauchlin.

Having shared an office with Jim during my earliest days as a lowly *Wizard* intern, I'd like to think that the best of him has rubbed off on me. And not in a perverted, Monica Lewinsky kind of way. I'm talking about his dry wit. His delightfully dirty humor. His fanboyish love affair with funnybooks.

His thirst for bourbon.

But knowing full well that I could never replace his alcohol-fueled antics in the office, I simply pledge to do my level best to fill his large (and slightly rotund) void in this letters page.

So join me in cracking open the very first mailbag in a brand new "Magic Words" era! And to get things started, here's a pop quiz: Can you guess what event dominated the landscape of Fanboy Nation in the month of September? Hint: It involved two universes, two teams and two decades of unbearable waiting.

That's right, we're talking about the debut of *JLA/Avengers*. Love it, hate it—bottom line, you talked about it. And boy, did we get a ton of mail about Supes eatin' hammer...

Dear Magic Words,

They almost released this book the year I was born, and 20 years later, when I'm in my fanboy prime, they finally release it. Who'da thunk it? It's almost like they were waiting for me to join the party!

Anyway, *JLA/Avengers* kicks ass. It contains some of the great elements that both books had when they started their current runs, which I miss: classic villans, classic concepts, an old-fashioned superhero sci-fi story and some of the greatest art comics have to offer. What else could a geek ask for?

There will be a lot of even bigger geeks than me who will probably find something about this book to bitch about. My message to them: *kiss my Puerto Rican comic book-reading ass!* This is history in the making, a true piece of Americana. This book is worth more than $5.95, it's worth 20 years of blood, sweat and tears, and all of you should be damn thankful that it's here.

ERIC RODRIGUEZ
Tallahassee, FL

Wanna make a creator blush? Pants him in the middle of a busy convention—or write him a glowing letter like this one.

When *JLA/Avengers* #1 hit stands, the creative team of Kurt Busiek and George Pérez nervously held their breaths for the reviews—and letters like this certainly helped them breathe a little easier. "We knew from the start that if we were going to do this right, it had to be an absolute old-school herofest," gushes a giddy Busiek. "And I'm delighted people seem to like what we've done. George is certainly kicking all kinds of ass, and I'm just desperately hanging on trying to steer the boat."

ENVELOPE ART

HENGKY TANOYO, Surabaya, Indonesia

QUICKHITS

[EDITOR'S NOTE: We literally drowned in JLA/Avengers letters this month, so we're dedicating "Quick Hits" entirely to what readers thought about the first issue of this historic crossover.]

"Kurt Busiek and George Pérez hit it out of the ballpark."

GIL HUDSON
SOMEWHERE IN THE U.S.A.

Thor's hammer meeting Superman's face: priceless!

YPACDADDY@AOL.COM

It's good. I'll buy all four. But it's just like "Star Wars: Episode One": All hype and no heart.

RAVEN GREGORY
RAVENGREGORY@AOL.COM

I don't like cliched dialogue. I don't like ponderous exposition. I don't like hackneyed plots that read like a video game. I don't like worthless guest appearances by grade C characters that pad the page count. I didn't like *JLA/Avengers*.

GREG GREEN
HOBOKEN, NJ

Kurt's premise for getting the two teams to fight is better than the usual "misunderstanding" that happens between superhero teams. And George's art! Wow!!

TOM PEARCE
TAPEARCE67@AOL.COM

The book spent far too much time trying to explain who everyone was and their relationships to one another.

JIM RICE

I expected more of an original plot. It's tiring having interdimensional villains of infinite power forcing two or more universes together to create conflict. It reads like a combination of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, *Heroes Reborn* and so many other tired plot devices.

R. SABONJIAN
WANNABEMLS@AOL.COM

Did anyone else think the Avengers came off as jerks?

AWEBER34@AOL.COM

JLA/Avengers never feels like a *What If?* story, but instead has all the urgency and intensity of an in-continuity event. And when the two teams finally face off, it feels so right.

CYCLOPS284@AOL.COM

What do you think of THIS issue? Let us know. Send an e-mail to: magicwords@wizarduniverse.com and be heard...er, read.

Adds partner in crime Pérez, "I'm just incredibly gratified by the reaction, considering the book's history and how much time and effort I've poured into each page. And I'm incredibly proud of Kurt's story...I think everyone was expecting glitzy artwork, but were surprised at how much meat there was to the story."

Some of the meatier moments that caught our eye in the office? The rooftop showdown between the League and the Avengers, Flash discovering the lack of a Speed Force in the Marvel U. and Hawkeye's wiseass Squadron Supreme remark.

By the way, *never* mess with Puerto Ricans who read comics. Just doesn't pay. Unless you're this next guy...

Magic Words,

So far for the first issue, a big fat *uhgg*! I am not really a fan of superteams to begin with, but this is George Pérez and we've been waiting since the invention of the radio for this matchup, so I figured, why the heck not?

Well, except for the ending, which finally picked up and kicked some ass, I thought the first issue was a snooze fest. I swear I almost nodded out twice! And this is from someone who loves to read and is not on drugs! The storyline seems muddled, and as much as I love George, I think he committed the artist sin of being overly busy on his panels, forcing my concentration to wander too much.

I sure hope the next $5.95 I plunk down gets me a better ringside seat, or else I might be throwing tomatoes at *JLA/Avengers*!

JR
Bronx, NY

Are you *sure* you're drug-free?

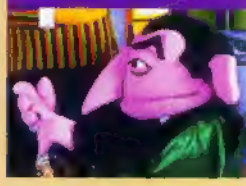
Props for remaining unimpressed by displays of Puerto Rican machismo—but you take the wind right outta your sails when you admit up front that you're not a fan of superteams. If you don't dig teams, what the hell were you thinking reading a book starring two of the biggest teams in comics?

And while I understand your beef about clutter, it sorta comes with the territory. "We're doing a story with nine million characters, so we're going to get tons and tons of interactions," defends Busiek. "If you want to just strip it down to something absolutely plain and simple, there's plenty of other crossovers to read. But here, we're dealing with two series that have so much history, texture and such large casts that it's better to revel in it than to throw it all out."

And if you still find yourself falling asleep, try some Ritalin—it's how I stay awake long enough to meet my deadlines.

DIDJA KNOW?

George Pérez drew 208 characters on the cover to *JLA/Avengers* #3!



Dear Sirs,

I've just finished reading the first two issues of *Thor: Vikings* and would hereby like to object to the way we Scandinavians are portrayed in these books. (If the Italians can complain about "The Sopranos"...) I would like to inform everyone that we Scandinavians are not all raping, murdering, pillaging, undead rotting zombies.

I also have a question. How did Mr. Ennis chose the name Jaekelsson for his main evil Viking chief? Does he know that the Swedish word jaekel means "bastard" in English? It's almost

too big a coincidence, right?

HENRIK ASKESTAD
Stockholm, Sweden

Of course you're not all undead rotting zombies—that's just the men. Scandinavian women all look like Playboy Playmate Victoria Silvstedt.

Actually, we're quite indebted to your area of the world, having produced such a fine supply of hot women and hot chocolate—two things Garth Ennis is rather fond of. He's also fond of funky names, though he admits he wasn't aware of the deeper meaning of his main baddie's moniker. "No, I didn't know that," laughs the Irish scribe. "I picked Jaekelsson so people could make a slight pun on his name and say things like 'son of a jackal.'" Jackal, bastard—it's all the same anyway.

Hey Magic Words,

After pouring through every name on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, I was unable to come up with any of comics' greatest heroes (and no, I'm not talking about Spider-Man). Where's Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Jim Lee, Todd McFarlane or Kevin Smith? Now, I tried to bear in mind that maybe the Walk of Fame was just for big-name movie stars and musicians and maybe a couple other extremely famous people. But then, I came across the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back: a star for Pat Sajak. By saying the words "spin the wheel," he's earned a star?!?

Well, ladies and fanboys, I have decided that this is my new personal quest—to get some of our greatest artists on that Walk of Fame.

VALCORE J.L GOODWIN IV
Wyandotte, MI

Do what you gotta do. If you actually succeed, we'll award you a star on Wizard's very own "Walk of Fame." (That's code for the stretch of tile between the urinal and the sink in the office bathroom.) If you fail, we'll strap you to a chair and force you to watch reruns of "Wheel of Fortune: Hawaii Week" on an endless loop.

'Course, it takes more than just guts and moxie to snag a star on the famed Hollywood sidewalk. $15,000 more, to be exact. That's the application fee for nominees, as stipulated in the guidelines for nomination (check out the details at the Walk's Website: **www.hollywoodcoc.org/walkoffame**). A committee meets every year to review nominations in five categories: radio, television, film, music and live performance. But really, you can nominate anyone, as long as they've made some sort of contribution to the entertainment world—and as long as you've got some loose cash.

Meanwhile, the deadline for nominating the next crop of stars is May 31, 2004, so get crackin' on selling that kidney!

Magic Words,

My two favorite villians are Carnage and Apocalypse, and I haven't seen them for a while. Do you know if they will be featured in any upcoming projects?

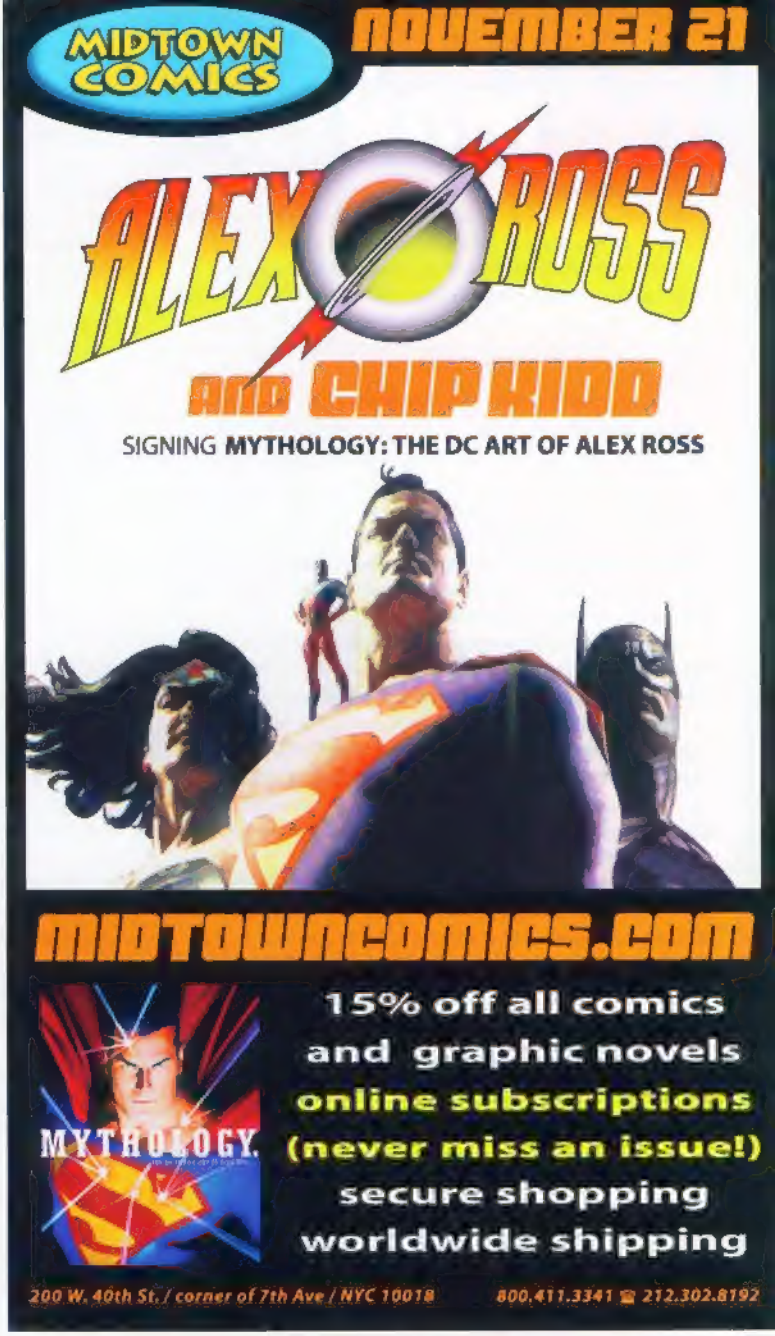
Kmt8804@aol.com

Both characters are currently in continuity purgatory—but anything's possible at the House of Ideas.

"We're talking about bringing Carnage back in some way, shape or form," reveals Spider-Man Editor Axel Alonso. "I've put out feelers to several creators, and when the right idea comes along, we'll pounce."

Apocalypse is a bit tricker. "Last time we saw Apocalypse, he was dead," points out X-Men Editor Mike Marts. But given the revolving door policy of Marvel's morgue, don't be surprised if the world's oldest mutant makes a comeback tour somewhere down the line. "After all, we all know that dead characters always stay dead, right?" laughs Marts.

Somewhere in the X-Mansion, Jean Grey is chuckling.



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Dear Magic Words,

I loved the first issue of *JLA/Avengers*—and it made me hungry for a crossover that was even more ambitious.

Let's say we do another big crossover between the DC and the Marvel universes. And at the end of this one-shot, several characters are hopelessly trapped in the opposite universe. They have every reason to believe they'll never get back.

Let's further imagine that the DC Heroes are guys like Captain Marvel, Superman and Green Lantern! Maybe the Marvel heroes are Iron Man, Wolverine and the Incredible Hulk. Wouldn't it be cool if, say, Superman was published by Marvel Comics with the Marvel logo for six months? Captain Marvel joins the Avengers! Green Lantern tries to find an alternate source of power for his ring! Superman single-handedly takes on guys like Dr. Doom and Thanos in order to put them down for truth, liberty and the American way!

Meanwhile, Wolverine joins the Outsiders! Iron Man shares his technology with Steel! The Incredible Hulk is on the run from LexCorp agents eager to dissect and study him!

Relationships form! Contuinity is enforced! Maybe a few deaths are caused by these visitors from another universe that become a part of the other universe's history!

And then, in six months they return back home and to their real roots, bearing all the scars and memories of their travels in their own books from then on.

Would there be ANY possibility of a major stunt like this ever occuring—solely for the pure fun of making comics a blast to read again—or is this just a publicity stunt that neither company would ever agree to?

JOHN YEO
asylum98@hotmail.com

It's a publicity stunt for sure—but a clever one, and one that I'd certainly be interested in reading. But that doesn't change the fact that it's a fanboy fantasy.

"I don't think it's possible," says Busiek. "Back when we were talking about doing *JLA/Avengers* in the individual *Avengers* and *JLA* books rather than as a separate miniseries, we ran into the same problem: DC and Marvel didn't want to have issues of an actual series that were unreprintable because they didn't own all the characters in it. I think it would be a ton of fun, and I'd love to write something like that—but I don't think it's gonna happen.

"Then again, 20 years ago they said *JLA/Avengers* couldn't be done. So who knows?"

Dear Magic Words,

I suppose since this crossover was initially supposed to be in the late '70s/early '80s, that they tried to give it that kind of feel in both writing and art. But unfortunately, that makes for a really boring read for anyone under the age of 35.

I view this as the new shining example of the death of comics. Instead of creating something good that anyone can pick up and enjoy, the industry caters to the people that it's already got. *JLA/Avengers* should have been the cutting edge of comics, with all the biggest characters in one book—but instead of getting the current cutting edge writers and artists, we got two old warhorses to peddle styles that haven't been entertaining in 20 years.

So my review is basically that if you were alive during the Silver Age, you'll think this was really good. If you were born after 1974, you'll probably laugh out loud at this book.

Nitewing64@aol.com

DIDJA KNOW?

Martian Manhunter is the only character to appear in every version of the JLA.

Sounds like someone needs an Ultimate Pacifier.

There's no rule that says "cutting edge" has to mean "ignoring everything that came before." The comics medium has evolved into a legitimate form of artistic expression, *precisely* because it takes stuff from the past and builds on it in the present. To arbitrarily say that something is boring simply because it has done in an earlier age is, quite simply, ignorant.

Judging from these letters alone, there are plenty of fans under the age of 20 who love this book—just as there are plenty of older fans who get a kick out of *The Ultimates*. Age shouldn't be a factor, and pigeon-holing creators or creative styles as outdated is definitely not cool. That kind of narrow-mindedness, in *my* opinion, is a true example of the death of comics.

And that's all he wrote for this, the inaugural voyage of my Magic Words stint. Sleep awaits! Hope it hasn't been too bumpy a ride—and I hope you'll come back for more in 30. 'Til then, keep hitting those funnybooks, and I'll keep hitting this keyboard.

Your New Whipping Boy,

Richard Ho

Staff Writer Richard Ho has often been called a true example of the death of comics. But he thinks they're all just jealous.

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MARK OF THE SPIDER

Millar, Dodson launch 'sophisticated' new Spider-Man title

SWING SHIFT Mark Millar and Terry Dodson plan more sophisticated, gritty stories in their new Spider-title come March 2004.

This spring, Spider-Man teams with two new amazing friends.

The superstar duo of writer Mark Millar (*Ultimates*) and artist Terry Dodson (*Trouble*) plans to launch a new Spider-book, tentatively titled *Spider-Man*, in March of 2004, they told *Wizard* exclusively. Comparing the new title to what the team of Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee did for *Batman*—lining up the Dark Knight's biggest foes in one 12-issue, fast-paced story under one all-star creative team—Millar said he plans to produce a sophisticated, but not mature reader, Spider-Man title that will redefine the entire Spider-Man mythos.

"As a kid, I was excited to see someone like [*Watchmen* writer] Alan Moore come on a book and show that character like you've never seen them before," expounded Millar. "I want you to see *Spider-Man* as you've never seen it before. I want to show each character and villain in a new light. It kind of bugs me when I see the Spider-Man villains played off as goofy. I never saw them like that. It's been played for laughs too much. I want the villains to be as horrific, frightening and as insane as possible. I'm using loads of villains in the first 12 issues but there's going to be a whole new twist on each villain when you see them."

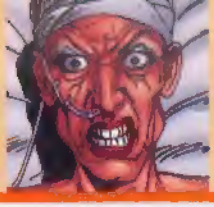
With Sony's "Spider-Man 2" hitting theaters on July 2, 2004, Marvel and Millar both know that there will be a frenzy of Spider-Man excitement throughout the world by the time the title's fifth issue ships, and while the new book may be more mature than other Spider-Man offerings, it will not be published under Marvel's mature reader MAX line as rumored, and may instead fall under the Marvel Knights banner.

DIDJA KNOW?

Before working in comics, Mark Millar wrote speeches for European politicians.

"We don't want to blur the lines with Spider-Man," explained series editor Axel Alonso. "You can have a *Punisher* MAX series, but there's no reason to

Teen's head perfect oval
"Yup, completely egg-shaped," says area geometry teacher... page 196



Why won't Grandma die?
Vicious old broad keeping you from your inheritance... page 202

go that way with Spider-Man. We think this book will skew towards an older audience, but we want this book to be accessible to all ages. What Mark plans to do is take Spider-Man to ground level. You'll see the bruises and scars that [Spider-Man's] earned over the years. We'll up the ante in terms of violence in the book. This will be the title where you can see [Spider-Man] lose a tooth."

According to Millar, the 12-issue arc—Millar won't commit to doing more than that at this point—revolves around one individual finding out that Peter Parker and Spider-Man are the same person and the havoc that causes for the red-and-blue Web-slinger as he goes to his 10-year high school reunion and battles well-known villains.

"As a kid, [secret identities] fascinated me most about superheroes—it was so important that no one knew who you really were," explained the writer of his inspiration. "There's been so many comics over the last 10 to 15 years where we've forgotten how cool the secret identity is. The thread that runs through all these smaller stories is that someone finds out that Peter Parker and Spider-Man are the same person in the first issue and does one thing that upsets everything. Peter's life and career are reeling from it for 12 issues from this one act. And it's a very simple thing and very obvious thing, but just one person finding out—the whole thing starts out with Uncle Ben's grave shattered into pieces and Spider-Man being told it's his fault."

While Millar is hesitant to reveal any major points of the story so early, he did want to assure fans that everything they love about Spider-Man will appear in his and Dodson's run. A longtime Web-head, Millar admitted that one of the few Marvel characters he knows a lot about is Spider-Man, and the dream of writing a new in-continuity Spider-Man title is literally a dream come true for the Scottish talent.

"I actually know sh--loads about Spider-Man; I love Spider-Man," exclaimed the writer. "[Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada] said to me, 'You don't strike me as a guy who would be interested in Spider-Man.' I took a day and spent five hours just scribbling ideas for Spider-Man. When you're working that fast, you know that it's good. I really think that could be my strongest Marvel work to date."
■ **MIKE COTTON**

'Ultimates' Nullified?

Never one afraid to takes chances, writer Mark Millar called up Marvel and asked the publisher to cancel his top-selling title, *The Ultimates*, with December's issue #13.

According to Millar, the scheme, which has infuriated some fans that see it as a publicity stunt meant to drive orders and return the title to the top slot on Diamond's Top 100 comics list with a new first issue, does have a purpose—and it's not just increased sales.

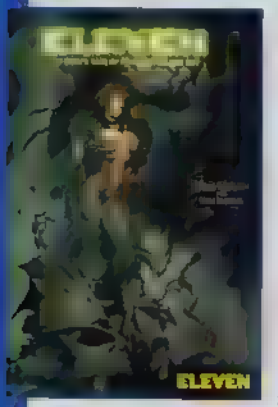
"*Ultimates* Volume Two, #1 is something we asked Marvel to do because we wanted every 13 issues of this book to be a new volume and come with a new number one," explained the Scottish writer. "Ideally, I'd only like to see creative teams on the book for one or two volumes at a time. It makes the new teams treat their new year on the title as a fresh start and reintroduce everything properly for new readers, something that hasn't always been done in the past. It's also a message to casual readers, our intended demographic, that they have a genuine jumping-on point and taking the whole thing away from the club feeling that issue #658 of a book engenders in the audience."

According to Millar, January's new #1, which will consist of the same creative team of Millar and penciler Bryan Hitch, will introduce more of a worldview of the Ultimates team. Titled "Persons of Mass Destruction," Millar said the next storyline will take place six months after the end of Volume One and revolve around a new superteam from Europe.

"Volume One was our first movie and Volume Two is our sequel," explained Millar. "The lives of our lead characters have all moved on somewhat. Certain characters have hooked up, a couple of them are getting married and one's lost everything and is having a nervous breakdown. [The story] explores the ramifications of this move in Europe where a new superhuman defense force is being initiated. Look out for Ultimate Defenders, Ultimate Captain Britain and the best scene I've ever written in the unlikely shape of Ultimate Nighthawk." ■ **MC**

THE BUZZ BIN

MARVEL After DC signed such high profile talent as Grant Morrison, Greg Rucka and Judd Winick to exclusive deals, Marvel countered by signing superstar artists Bryan Hitch (*Ultimates*), Salvador Larrocca (*X-Treme X-Men*), Stuart Immonen (*Hulk*) and Scott Kolins (upcoming *Avengers* artist) to exclusive contracts.

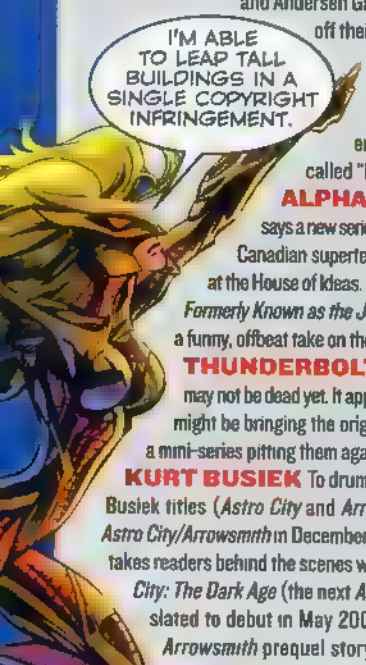


TOP COW Look for Marc Silvestri to bust out his writing skills this holiday season. To celebrate Top Cow's 11th anniversary, the founder penned a deluxe coffee table book giving fans the inside scoop on the rise of the popular studio. It's called *Eleven: Top Cow's Tale of Revolution and Art*, and it'll be in bookstores in December.

FANTASTIC FOUR After a very public exit from *Fantastic Four*, writer Mark Waid and artist Mike Wieringo received an offficial apology from Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada and have decided to remain on the title. The previously announced new team of newcomer Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa and Steve McNiven (*Meridian*) will be given their own Marvel Knights Fantastic Four title beginning in February 2004.

BATMAN Contrary to initial reports that Bill Sienkiewicz and David Lapham will be jumping onto *Batman* following the Brian Azzarello/Eduardo Risso run, DC confirms that the duo is indeed working on an as-yet-unnamed Batman project—but it has not been locked in as the next arc on the regular series. Stay tuned for details.

BAT-BOOKS *Batman* ain't the only Bat-title getting fresh doses of talent—both *Gotham Knights* and *Detective Comics* will feature new creative teams in 2004. A.J. Lieberman and Al Barrionuevo will take over *Gotham Knights* starting with February's issue #50, and Andersen Gabrych and Pete Woods will kick off their *Detective* stint with January's issue #790. And word is, Lieberman's first *Gotham Knights* arc might interest readers who enjoyed a little storyline called "Hush."



ALPHA FLIGHT Word out of Marvel says a new series starring every comic fan's favorite Canadian superteam is on track for February 2004 at the House of Ideas. Reportedly, the series will take the *Formerly Known as the Justice League* formula to produce a funny, offbeat take on the team by writer Scott Lobdell.

THUNDERBOLTS The recently canceled title may not be dead yet. It appears Kurt Busiek (*JLA/Avengers*) might be bringing the original Thunderbolts team back for a mini-series pitting them against the Avengers in 2004.

KURT BUSIEK To drum up excitement for a pair of Kurt Busiek titles (*Astro City* and *Arrowsmith*), DC plans to release *Astro City/Arrowsmith* in December. The special edition "split" book takes readers behind the scenes with an exclusive prelude to *Astro City: The Dark Age* (the next *Astro City* mini-series tentatively slated to debut in May 2004), along with the eight-page *Arrowsmith* prequel story previously available only on Wildstorm.com. ■ **THE WIZARD STAFF**

CAPTAIN COMEBACK

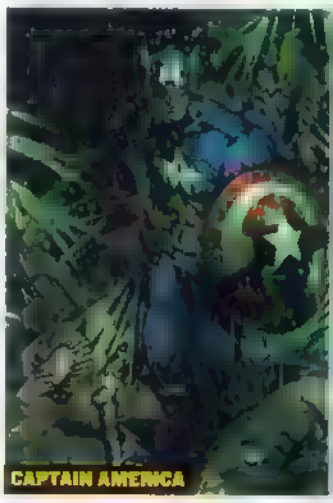
Morales, Bachalo unite to revitalize 'Cap'

Marvel's turning up the heat on Captain America's personal life.

After a series of major shake-ups, the Star-Spangled Avenger will finally get a regular creative team with December's *Captain America* #21 with writer Bob Morales (*Truth: Red, White and Black*) and artist Chris Bachalo (*New X-Men*). The team's top priority? Give Cap a life outside the usual shield-slamming action.

Morales and Bachalo will be putting the microscope on Steve Rogers, Captain America's often-overlooked alter ego, not to mention trying to make the classic Avenger, well, cool.

"What's been missing is any sense of Captain America as a laudable person," Morales said. "I see Cap as Steve Roger's power, not a persona, so it's Steve who has the wealth of experience that should enrich the book. He's a sickly kid from the Depression who was given an incredible gift and responsibility, and he's lived in two different time periods. He's a positive, can-do guy who's mostly self-taught. As Cap, he reconfigures his qualities into the best America has to offer the world."



Don't expect Morales to dredge up obscure villains and supporting characters from Cap's past, though. These new stories will be streamlined and uncluttered, the scribe notes.

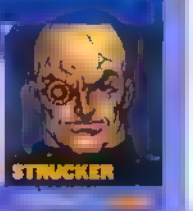
"The series is being retooled as continuity-lite for the immediate future," Morales said. "Marvel wants something that new readers can access while giving hardcore fans a good read. Since Steve Rogers' personal life is a major element, we'll get to meet his non-super friends."

Morales is looking to shake the status quo with the first arc and promises to keep readers on their toes, whether they like it or not. Though details are limited, Morales shared a few highlights from his first arc.

"Steve meets his new girlfriend; Captain America serves on a military tribunal in Guantanamo Bay," Morales hinted. "Both stories have surprises." ■ **ALEX SEGURA JR.**

TRIVIA TIME

1 Yorgon Tykkio	A. Hydra
2 The Ravager	B. League of Assassins
3 Dr. Ebenezer Darrk	C. A.I.M.
4 Baron Strucker	D. H.I.V.E.



THE GREAT DEBATE

HUSH: Did it deliver?

There's no staying mum on "Hush."

The most talked-about series [illegible] "Blackest Night," "Batman: R.I.P." or "Battle," Jeph Loeb's #608 presented the action-packed conclusion to Jim Lee and Jeph Loeb's 12-issue magnum opus. We turned to two [illegible] for their takes on the payoff to the most hyped *Batman* story in decades!

WARNING! SPOILER ALERT!

YES!

[illegible] me up about how [illegible] *Batman* #619. Here's why:

1. It re-established Riddler from bad to badass. [illegible] threw me the wildest of red herrings—the main baddie was not who we expected at all. It wasn't Hush, but Riddler who pulled all the strings. And now he knows who Batman is, which boosts his cache because it proves he's much more clever than anyone thought. Just when we—and, [illegible] knowing wink, the creators—[illegible] thought—wrote off Mr. Nigma in his appearance in *Batman* #615, it turns out that issue held many answers to the "Hush" riddle, after all.

2. Batman and Catwoman. C'mon, who [illegible] really believe that relationship's truly over? "Hush" [illegible] a much more interesting scenario between the both of them.

3. The romance has my heart, [illegible] more interesting as a tortured soul in *Long Halloween*/another than as Two-Face. With his timely appearance in #608, I'm very interested in what's *not* being told here. Which leads me to...

4. Sequel potential. Now I wanna know more about Tommy Elliot and what his real deal is. If his face is bandaged, does he have a new face? How does he really go major league in Bat's rogues gallery? And what's up with Harvey? Is he really cured or being set up for an even more sinister fall?

All in all, I'm pumped for more coming out of "Hush." Isn't that what all great comics do? —BRIAN CUNNINGHAM

NO!

In the end, "Hush" didn't make much noise for me.

After 12 issues of speculation and debate, the closest fans got to any kind of resolution about the bandaged villain's identity was watching Hush plunge into a river, leaving readers all wet.

There was no big reveal. No ultimate payoff. Hush never even took off his mask. Sure, thanks to the connect-the-dots dialogue between Batman and Hush, we discovered the villain was—gasp!—Tommy Elliot, the "childhood friend from Bruce Wayne's past" that just happened to return just as Hush appeared? Color me surprised.

But it doesn't end there. After the big reveal was imposed of amid a pile of spooky bandages and trademark Aristotle quotes, fans were treated to a super big reveal, which was so important it superceded the point and remainder of the entire storyline. That's right fanboys, the true villain wasn't Hush after all—it was the Riddler!

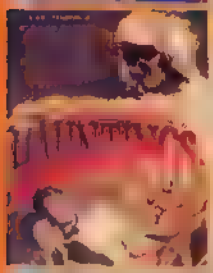
Wait, wait ...the Riddler?! Yes. Edward Nigma was the "mastermind" behind, well, not much, considering everything aside from Harvey Dent reverted back to the Batman status quo on the last page. Not only did we *not* get the big Hush reveal, but we discover that the one pulling all the strings was Batman's most overrated rogue. Anyone out there ever read a cool Riddler story? Let's see a show of hands. Didn't think so.

The sad fact is, after a year of hints and a not-so-startling finale, "Hush" ended with a painfully drawn out yawn. —ALEX SEGURA

HEAT INDEX

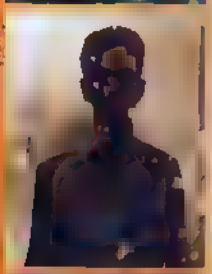
GREEN ARROW #30 (DC) Judd Winick has been right on target portraying Green Arrow, a hero waging war against crime while battling inner demons. This time, those demons drive the Emerald Archer into a war with super-assassin Drakon, but when this hired gun attacks someone close to Ollie, let's just say the ending to this ish hits the bullseye with us!

CAPTAIN AMERICA #17 (Marvel Knights) There's something off about the world Cap wakes up to after being frozen in ice. The Swastika banners all over New York City? Or the fact Cap's the last line of resistance in a world ruled by the Red Skull?! Dave Gibbons and Lee Weeks earn an "A" for this action-packed tale of Cap taking on a world full of Nazis!



DARK HORSE BOOK OF HAUNTINGS (Dark Horse) Variety's the spice of this dish, with eclectic stories ranging from hilarious to horrifying, including Mike Mignola's only Hellboy tale of 2003, to Jill Thompson (*Scary Godmother*) and Evan Dorkin's (*Agent X*) amusing yarn about a haunted doghouse! If you're looking for a frighteningly good read, this is it!

NEW X MEN #146 (Marvel) From start to finish, this is the issue *every* X-Fan has been waiting on. With gorgeous art by Phil Jimenez and a pulse pounding tale by Grant Morrison, this issue had it all. But what really drove us wild was the big reveal, as Prof. Xavier lays crippled, Xorn, one of his newest teachers, is revealed to be...well, some of you might be waiting for the trade.



HUMAN TARGET #2 (DC/Vertigo) Peter Milligan (*X-Statix*) hasn't lost a step in the series' new ongoing monthly. Impersonating a man who faked his own death in the World Trade Center tragedy to avoid jail time for a stock scam, lead character Christopher Chance gets pulled into a plot to bilk a corrupt CEO out of $5 million in this neo-noir nail-biter.

TRANSFORMERS G.I. JOE #1 (Dreamwave) Take the characters you know and love, apply Jae Lee's dark, noirish renderings and place it among the chaos of World War II, and you get this kickass crossover tale. With plenty of geeky fanboy moments (like Snake-Eyes facing off against Storm Shadow), this debut issue proves that '80s-mania still has some muscle!

DANIEL WAY'S GETTING ANTSY

Ant-Man spotlighted in new Marvel MAX series

Size doesn't matter for Daniel Way—at least when it comes to his comic subjects.

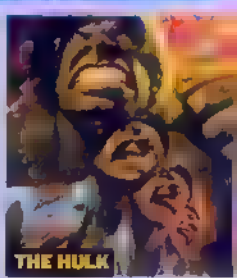
Way (*Venom, Gun Theory*) launches a new five-issue *Ant-Man* mini-series from Marvel's mature reader MAX line in December and promised Henry Pym's going to outgrow his current reputation.

"The broad theme of it is that he's a guy, who just because he can become microscopically small, doesn't like that people look at him that way," revealed Way, who will team with artist Clayton Crain (*Spawn*). "Iron Man's out there whooping ass, getting chicks and s--t. Everything Ant-Man does is too small for the eye to see. He's a guy who's got an inferiority complex and then he goes and makes something to make him small—that's probably not the best thing for him. This is Ant-Man's never-ending quest for validation."

According to Way, Ant-Man will be contacted by a group of U.S. defense contractors who have a problem with internal information leaks and recruit the Avenger to investigate who' behind the information theft. And if the government's involved, look for "nudity, cursing, sex...keep on going," added Way of the explicit series with a chuckle ■ **MC**

CANITBEDONE?

Sure, it all sounds good: Bruce Banner wanders into the middle of a gamma bomb explosion and is bombarded by gamma radiation, unleashing the most violent aspects of his personality in the form of the Hulk.



But what exactly are gamma rays...and what would happen if someone were exposed?

Gamma rays are an extremely high-energy form of electromagnetic radiation. They're only spit out by cataclysmic events like nuclear explosions and supernovas—just think microscopic death rays and you've got a pretty good picture.

According to writers (and science freaks) Lois Gresh and Robert Weinberg in their book, *The Science of Superheroes*, gamma radiation has a nasty habit of killing any living thing it encounters. "[Gamma] radiation doesn't transform living cells," they write. "Nor does it cause certain glands to overreact and mutate human bodies. When charged particles travel through human tissue, they strip electrons from atoms and molecules, thus destroying their ability to function. [Gamma] radiation in large doses only does one thing, and it does that well: it kills." Which means that Banner fellow must have some pretty thick skin. ■ **RICHARD HO**

DC AWAKENS 'THE MONOLITH'

New book finds monsters roaming the tunnels beneath New York City

Forget about alligators in the sewers. There's a 70-year-old monster lurking in the tunnels beneath Brooklyn, and it's about to see the light of day—courtesy of DC's *The Monolith*, a gritty new monthly series set to debut in January 2004.

"The Monolith is an urban legend hidden beneath the city that protects the very

streets where he was created," explained co-writer Jimmy Palmiotti (*2I Down*). "It's a golem created in the '30s that's finally unleashed in the present day, and the story explores what happens to him and the young girl that looks after him."

That girl's name is Alice Cohen, a 20-year-old castaway surviving on the mean city streets. On the run from a murderous drug dealer named Princeton, Alice inherits her grandmother's house—along with the avenging creature of justice living below it.

Co-written by Palmiotti and Justin Gray (*The Resistance*) with art by Phil Winslade (*Daredevil/Spider-Man: Unusual Suspects*), *The Monolith* jumps back and forth between the present day and the Depression-era 1930s, when the monster was created as the living embodiment of the city to protect the lower classes.

"[An art teacher] told me about a tunnel that ran under his Brooklyn home all the way to the Lower East Side," explained Palmiotti. "For years, my imagination went wild thinking about what might be lurking in that tunnel—and that's how I came up with the idea for this story!" ■ **RH**

VAMPIRE VICES

Joss Whedon and 'Buffy' scribes team for 'Tales of the Vampire' mini

This winter, Joss Whedon takes another bite out of vampires.

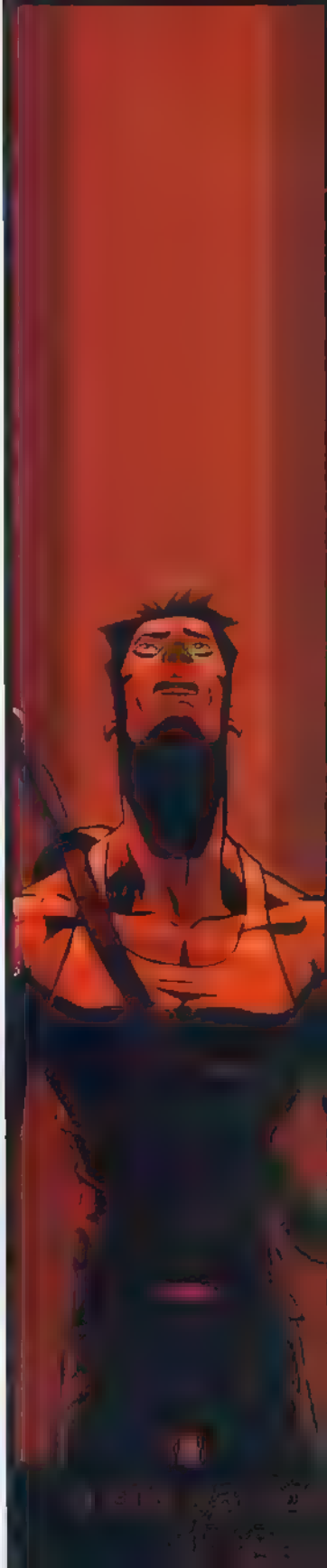
The highly acclaimed creator of "Buffy The Vampire Slayer" and "Angel" plans to launch a new five-issue mini-series titled "Tales of the Vampire" from Dark Horse in December.

According to Whedon, fans of his two hit shows can expect the same level of finely tuned, witty dialogue and fast-paced plots, since all the stories in the series will be written by writers from the show, including himself, Jane Espenson, Brett Matthews and others. Whedon also hand-picked every artist for the series, including Cameron Stewart (*Catwoman*) and Scott Morse (*Elektra: Glimpse and Echo*).

"*Tales of the Vampires* is something I have wanted to do for a long while," said Whedon while working on the current season of "Angel." "The more I work on my shows, the more fascinated I've become with the mindset of the immortal killer. Every [vampire] is so different, and *Tales* is a chance to delve into that. Most importantly there's the question: What's it like [to be a vampire]?"

That's the question that the entire Scooby gang will be tackling. According to series editor Scott Allie, the post-"Buffy" supplement for the recently retired TV series will feature some of the show's most infamous characters, including Spike, Dru and Angelus, as well as Dracula.

"This group of young Watchers go into this dungeon to meet their first vampire, who's there just for that purpose," explained Allie. "He kind of tells the lore of vampires to these Watchers in training." ■ **MC**



THE X-FACTOR

Who should take over writing 'New X-Men'?

With Grant Morrison exiting *New X-Men* following March's issue #153, Marvel's got to find a new scribe for the book, and there's a host of creators vying to take over the writing reins on the top-selling title. From *Origin* writer Paul Jenkins to *Sandman* creator Neil Gaiman to "Buffy: The Vampire Slayer" creator Joss Whedon, these are the writers fans are clamoring to see take on Marvel's merry mutants. We've broken down the top candidates, and the odds that one of them will get Morrison's starting spot on the title

BRIAN K. VAUGHAN

WHY HE'D ROCK: Vaughan was set to take over *Ultimate X-Men*, but insiders say his story didn't quite fit the Ultimate mold. But as seen in *Y: The Last Man*, *Mystique* and *Runaways*, Vaughan's too good of a writer to not be considered.

STUMBLING BLOCK: Vaughan's got three ongoing series and three upcoming minis on tap

PAUL JENKINS

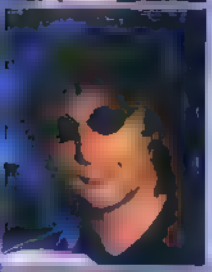
WHY HE'D ROCK: With two huge X-events under his belt (*Origin* and *Wolverine: The End*) Jenkins is a perfect fit, thanks to deft dialogue and a talent for high-action/adventure stories.

STUMBLING BLOCK: Already committed to *Spectacular Spider-Man* for 18 issues and a number of other projects, Jenkins is swamped.

KEVIN SMITH

WHY HE'D ROCK: A fanboy favorite, Smith combines trendy dialogue with continuity-heavy tales that appeal to hardcore and new fans alike

STUMBLING BLOCK: Smith and deadlines go together like oil and water. With Marvel looking for an immediate replacement, Smith likely wouldn't have time to get scripts in for the series



NEIL GAIMAN

WHY HE'D ROCK: After nailing the original X-Men in *1602*, Gaiman could tackle the current team with his well thought out and almost-Shakespearean tales—a perfect fit for the X-Men.

STUMBLING BLOCK: With another novel planned as well as finishing *1602*, Gaiman may need some time off before another comic project

JOSS WHEDON

WHY HE'D ROCK: The "Buffy" and "Angel" creator has a mind made for intricate subplots and character development as well as action-packed battles making Whedon a perfect match.

STUMBLING BLOCK: The hectic schedule of working on "Angel" during the fall TV season would most likely keep Whedon out of the gig.

HULK PLUNGES INTO DARKNESS

Marvel, Top Cow announce latest crossover event

Is the Hulk afraid of the dark? Top Cow plans to find out! Hot on the heels of the forthcoming *Wolverine/Witchblade* crossover, Top Cow President Matt Hawkins has announced that a *Darkness/Hulk* one-shot crossover, tentatively scheduled for May 2004, is in the early stages of development

Sweetening the deal is the news that *Darkness/Hulk* will indeed come to light by way of all-star collaborators Paul Jenkins and artist Dale Keown, both of whom have worked on ol' Green Genes in the past. So how do you successfully pair up The Darkness with "the strongest there is?"

"Basically, you've got to look at the similarities between Jackie Estacado and Bruce Banner," Jenkins explained. "Banner has this thing inside of him that he does not like—that he tries so hard to protect himself, and the world, from. Estacado, on the other hand, is a f--ker, and he has this thing inside of him that he really doesn't like, but he goes, 'OK, fine. I'll exploit it,' and he uses it and doesn't really care who gets in the way." ■ **CHRIS WARD**

CHARACTER TO WATCH: JESSICA JONES

She's hot, she's tough, and we only know [illegible] Purple Man did to her in issue #26.

Jessica Jones started out as a superhero, but after playing love slave to the masochistic Purple Man for eight months, and eventually tangling with the Avengers *and* the Defenders, she gave it up to be a private dick with a drinking habit and jaw-shattering right hook.

The mystery of Jessica's sordid past comes together with [illegible] shocking issue #28—the final issue of *Alias*—but she'll be taking center stage again in Marvel's new [illegible] ing, all ages series *The Pulse* from Brian Michael Bendis. "*The Pulse* will focus on Jessica and [illegible] Ulrich, and will be set within *The Daily Bugle*," revealed the scribe.

"We have the [illegible] one of the most famous Marvel characters in the first arc, and super Spidey front and center in the first issue," teased Bendis. "We have a reporter's view of Wolverine's life, and a three-generation story of the Marvel Universe a la *Once Upon a Time in America*." ■ **TODD CASEY**

CROSSGEN SET TO DECLARE 'WAR'

Cataclysmic mini-series promises to rock the foundations of the CGU

The tides of war are about to come crashing down on Tampa, Fla.

CrossGen is mobilizing for the biggest event in company history—a four-issue monthly miniseries that pits the CrossGen Universe against the Negation Universe in a war of cosmic proportions. "The world-smashing war machine of the Negation Universe is invading our own, and the only thing standing between utter domination by this alien empire is a gathering of heroes," declared CrossGen senior writer Ron Marz (*The Path*). "This is, in fact, why all of these heroes were created."

The War breaks out in February 2004, with Marz and artist Bart Sears (*The Path*) leading the charge. Said Marz, "We'll irrevocably change the universe!"

No corner of the Sigilverse will be spared, as every title set in the mainstream CGU gets in on the action. "Naturally, there are books and characters who play larger roles than others," explained Marz. "Ethan from *Scion* has a bigger part to play than Boon from *Way of the Rat*, for example. But we'll get at least a glimpse of everybody."

And don't worry if you haven't been an avid CrossGen follower from the very beginning—*The War* will be conducted with new readers in mind. "Unlike a traditional crossover, it won't be continued in the individual books," promised Marz. "The whole thing will be self-contained, and I'm writing it to be as new-reader friendly as possible."

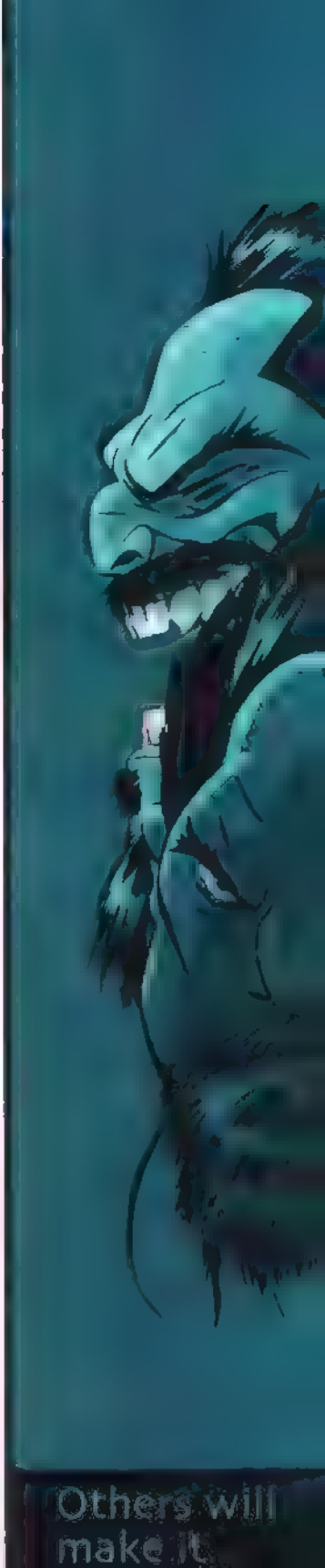
For the strategists who mapped out the first four years of CrossGen's existence, this event has been part of the battle plan from the start. "When we first started publishing in 2000, we were always laying the groundwork for a war on a cosmic scale," reveals Marz. "We've been dropping hints and clues for nearly four years."

Of course, like any war, the payoff will include dire consequences for the combatants. "Some titles will end, some characters will die and new titles will rise from the ashes," teased Marz. "This is really going to be a watershed project for CrossGen as a whole." ■ **RH**

CROSS WALKS

In a surprising move, CrossGen announced at the end of September that it was laying off 25 employees, including both business and creative personnel. CrossGen was not available for official comment, but sources inside the company attribute the layoffs to a widespread cost-cutting initiative to make the company more financially efficient, and are optimistic that the much publicized financial woes (which culminated in the public complaints of several unpaid freelancers and hiccups in the company's shipping schedules) will soon be behind them.

In addition to the 25 layoffs, *Ruse* artist Butch Guice resigned as Assistant Art Director and is currently fielding offers from other companies. The company's other marquee names, including Ron Marz, Chuck Dixon and Bart Sears, are still with CrossGen, though many creators, including Greg Land, George Pérez, Jimmy Cheung and Jeff Johnson among others, are reportedly seeking work outside of the company. ■ **RH**

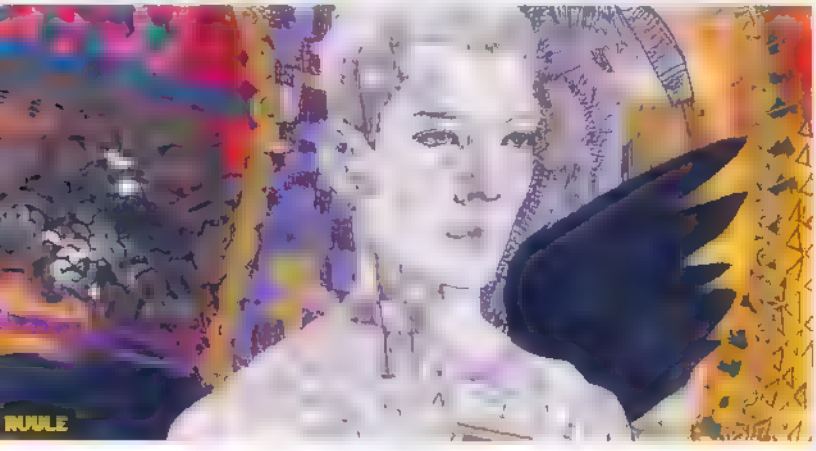


'RUULE' THE DAY

Beckett Publishing begins plans to launch a new line of comics

Beckett Publishing may be known for home runs in sports card publishing, but now the company's going for a grand slam with comics

The longtime publisher of sports card collector magazines plans to venture into comic book publishing this winter with Beckett Comics. After successfully snagging the rights to the "T3" comics, Beckett Comics now plans to put out an entire line of new series over the next year



First up is *T3* comic writer Ivan Brandon's *Ruule, Ganglord of Chinatown*, issue #1 of which ships in November. Much like a classic western, the story follows a lone outsider who happens upon a small town overrun by bikers and thugs.

"It's about a beat up city and a group of kids who are done with getting smacked around," explained Brandon of the series, which will feature covers by *Kabuki* creator David Mack. "It's set in a San Francisco environment overrun by thugs who use it up for whatever they need, walking on the backs of the people who live there. But as bad as things are, they could always be worse. So in the interest of the status quo, the people just hand over everything to the bikers and get out of their way...they take a beating and never raise their hands. Our protagonist, Gid, doesn't know any better, so when he sees a young girl getting mauled, he gets his knife dirty."

According to Beckett editor Gabriel Benson, the five-issue *Ruule* mini-series only scratches the surface of a much more ambitious schedule of books and projects

"We plan to do a lot more comics," said Benson. "Pretty much we're going to keep going as far as we can. We have a whole bunch of things going now that we're going to try to get out by next summer. Probably a few licensed properties as well as more *Ruule*. We'll have a superhero thing we're working on called *Fade*. And there's just a whole lot of things that we're pushing for now."

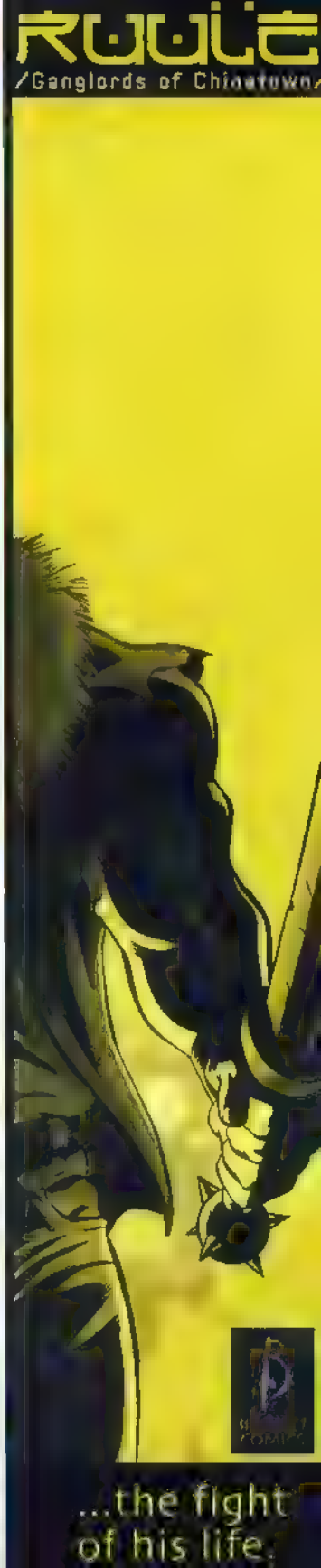
Brandon reminded fans that this first series is only the beginning of a much larger tale that will continue in upcoming mini-series planned for next year from Beckett, but fans should know that each story can be read separately and without feeling like they've missed anything.

"Each story is pretty self contained, so while they share themes, they don't interact on a timeline," said the writer. "Each story has a start and a finish independent of the last or of the next one. There's no end in sight." ■ MC

THEY SAID IT

"I'm a total dollar bin whore!"

DC VP OF EDITORIAL DAN DIDIO, ON COMIC PURCHASES AT THE RECENT BALTIMORE COMICCON



AQUAMAN

Fishing for the surprise smash of '04? Here's 7 reasons why 'Aquaman' will reel you in hook, line and sinker

Will Pfeifer swears he's not treading water when he proudly proclaims: "Aquaman's not just a guy who talks to fish!"

Come February, Pfeifer plans to prove it in a dramatic new direction in DC Comics' *Aquaman* #15. In fact, after reading a sneak preview, he and artist Patrick Gleason have hooked us already. And, appropriately for the king of the seven seas, here's seven reasons why.

7 [redacted] "People like to bust on Aquaman, but he's a really good character with a lot of potential," Pfeifer says. "Everyone laughed at *Swamp Thing* until Alan Moore saw the possibilities and made it a cool book." He pauses and sighs, "There's even a thread on the DC message boards: 'Is Aquaman gay?'"

The 36-year-old writer aims to sink that notion concerning Arthur Curry, ex-king of Atlantis, by exploring his full potential.

"His domain—the ocean—covers three-fourths of the Earth. He's its protector and ambassador to the DC Universe. That alone puts him on a level above most other heroes. What's more, his telepathic connection to sea creatures—which goes way beyond 'talking with fish'—links him to everything from football field-sized swarms of plankton to the blue whale. If he ever taps into the tremendous power and influence he's potentially linked to, he could do just about anything."

6 [redacted] Within *Aquaman* #15's first three pages, half of San Diego has fallen into the Pacific. "This is a huge disaster," says Pfeifer. "And Aquaman is the best—and maybe only—person equipped to deal with it."

The opening is so creepy, you'd swear it was a Vertigo comic. It kicks off with a panda bear drifting lifelessly toward you, leading to a spread of carnage (see below) and thousands dead. Aquaman appears immediately to save any trapped survivors.

5 [redacted]SS "We're trying to make Aquaman a person to contend with," says Pfeifer, who puts Aquaman back in his classic orange and green costume for the first time in a decade. "He's a quiet, intimidating guy. Tough and smart. When he speaks, he expects people to listen."

While Aquaman's not Superman-strong, Pfeifer argues that he holds his own. "Under the water, he's tough to beat," he says. "There's a scene in issue #17 where he's lifting half a city block to show people how strong he can be."

> **"There's even a thread on DC's message boards: 'Is Aquaman gay?'"**
>
> **PFEIFER, LAMENTING AQUAMAN'S REP**

4 JLA RESPECT Pfeifer feels Aquaman deserves more props. "A lot of times you see him as a second-tier figure in the JLA," he says. "I don't think they rank each other. I think Aquaman, who's been a leader of an entire people, could have a decisive role in leading the group because he's a 'big-picture' guy."

3 BLACK MANTA "Black Manta killed Aquaman's baby son. To me, he's Aquaman's Joker," says Pfeifer. "I definitely want to use him. Especially after what he said about *Aquaman* being canceled [in August's *Wizard* Zero]. That bastard!"

2 PFEIFER KNOWS WHAT NOT TO DO If anything, the writer has pinpointed the two things that have plagued the hero. "One, it's the one-hour time limit [out of water]," Pfeifer says. "'Super Friends' set him up to be useless because most stories took place on land. And two, it's the 'talks to fish' thing. I picked up the ['40s reprint book] *Aquaman Archives*, and they're damn goofy. There's one where Aquaman sets up a fish hospital under the ocean, and not only does he hang up a sign that says 'Fish Hospital'—because I guess all fish can read—but he'd bandage up an octopus' leg and stuff, and he'd wear a little doctor's outfit. No wonder people think he's a goof."

1 AQUAMAN'S 'HUSH' STORY Much like *Batman*'s mega-hit "Hush" arc, the mystery of what was behind San Diego will also last a year. Aquaman will soon discover something fishy about the San Diego tragedy: It was no natural disaster.

"There's definitely something a little more sinister," he says. "It won't be easily solved."

Which brings Pfeifer full-circle to Aquaman's potential. "He's only as good as the people handling it," he states. "We're hoping we can do some good stuff and make him seem less of a wimp. Although that fish hospital tale, that's a helluva story." ■ **BRIAN CUNNINGHAM**

SHOCK WAVE When San Diego falls into the Pacific and thousands perish, only Aquaman can pick up the pieces.

COUP D'ETAT

Jim Lee stages a triumphant takeover and makes his official return to the WildStorm universe

First came Gotham City. Then Metropolis. But Jim Lee won't be satisfied until he takes over the entire world. So next February, that's exactly what he'll do

WRITER VARIOUS
ARTIST JIM LEE & OTHERS
WILDSTORM

STORM CENTER

THE DILLY-O The "Eye of the Storm" writers team up with a quartet of WildStorm artists for a four-part weekly event in February 2004 that will see the Authority take over the world

WHY YOU CARE After devoting the first year of his comeback to DC icons like Batman and Superman superstar artist Jim Lee contributes his pencils to a WildStorm project for the first time since 1998's *Divine Right*

DID YOU KNOW? Because of the geographical gap between London-based *Authority* scribe Robbie Morrison and his California-dwelling "Eye of the Storm" cohorts, planning sessions for *Coup D'etat* took the form of e-mail exchanges that often resulted in e-mail threads up to 10 pages long!

After topping the charts in 2003 with an acclaimed *Batman* stint and recently signing on for a yearlong run on *Superman*, the WildStorm founder caps off his comeback by returning to the universe he helped launch in 1992. And to celebrate his homecoming, the imprint's "Eye of the Storm" mature-readers line will unleash an unprecedented four-part special event called *Eye of the Storm: Coup D'etat*. The crossover marks Lee's first artistic contribution to his creator-owned sandbox in five years—and for the artist, it's a return long in the making.

"Back in 1998 when I sold the company [to DC], the plan was to alternate between drawing DCU characters and WildStorm characters," says Lee. "Given how successful *Batman* was and the anticipation of the fans for more iconic work like *Superman*, it's difficult to tear yourself away. But I didn't want WildStorm fans to feel that I was just abandoning ship to work on DC stuff. The WildStorm universe holds a very special place in my heart, so I'll always return to it."

To pull off his coup, Lee recruited the "Eye of the Storm" writers—*Sleeper* scribe Ed Brubaker, *Stormwatch: Team Achilles* writer Micah Ian Wright, *Wildcats 3.0* scribe Joe Casey and *The Authority* writer Robbie Morrison—to craft the earth-shattering story. (Brubaker teams with Lee for the first issue, Wright pairs up with *Vigilante* collaborator Carlos D'Anda on #2, Casey and *Titans/Young Justice: Graduation Day* artist Alé Garza collaborate on #3, and Morrison scripts the final issue with art by veteran penciler Whilce Portacio.)

World conquest is the name of the game when the four-issue mini-series replaces the February releases of the "Eye of the Storm" titles. By anchoring the storyline around the Authority's domination of the world, *Coup D'etat* will take the issue of the global role of metahumans to the next level.

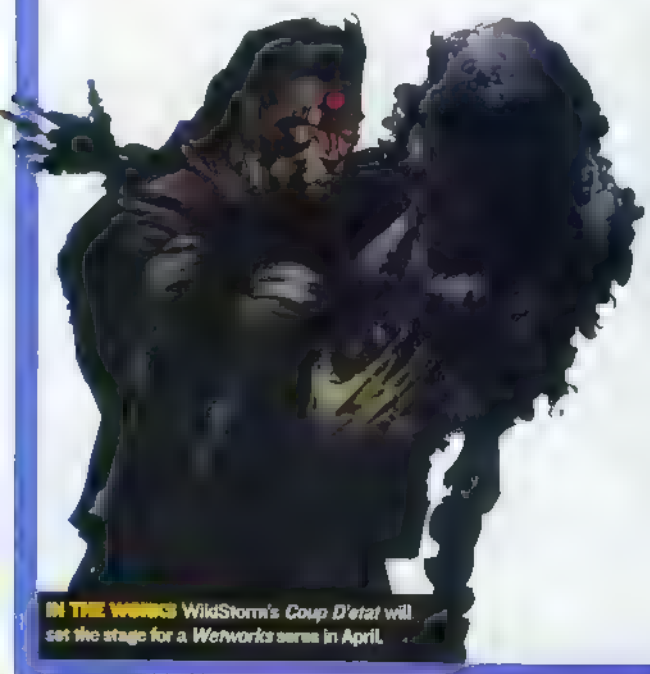
"We wanted to avoid the typical aliens-come-to-earth crossover event and focus more on the characters," explains Lee. "So we basically have the Authority jumping to the front of the line and completely upsetting the status quo, and everyone else has to react to them. The title itself, *Coup D'etat*, speaks to the idea of world change through force—and if you have a group of superheroes as powerful as the Authority and the sort of world view they hold, it just makes sense that this could happen."

And because each "Eye of the Storm" title boasts a unique tone and flavor, the all-encompassing storyline promises to create a fascinating mix for readers. "Each book, team and character occupy different niches within the universe, and each has a very different political point of view in terms of the role of metahumans in the world," explains Lee. "This event affects everybody, and brings all these characters and teams into opposition with one another. And it also opens the door for the new *Wetworks* series in April."

In the meantime, the writers are still wrestling with the question that everyone wants answered: Will the Authority get their butts kicked?

"That's being hotly debated right now!" laughs Lee. "How will it end? Does the 'Eye of the Storm' universe return to a status quo? How will each of the titles change? Each of the writers have an idea of where they want their books to go after this event, and now it's just a matter of figuring out how the event should end, so that it sets up their next big storylines.

"But I can tell you, we're all having fun playing around with it!" ■ RICHARD HO



IN THE WORKS WildStorm's *Coup D'etat* will set the stage for a *Wetworks* series in April.

RON PERLMAN

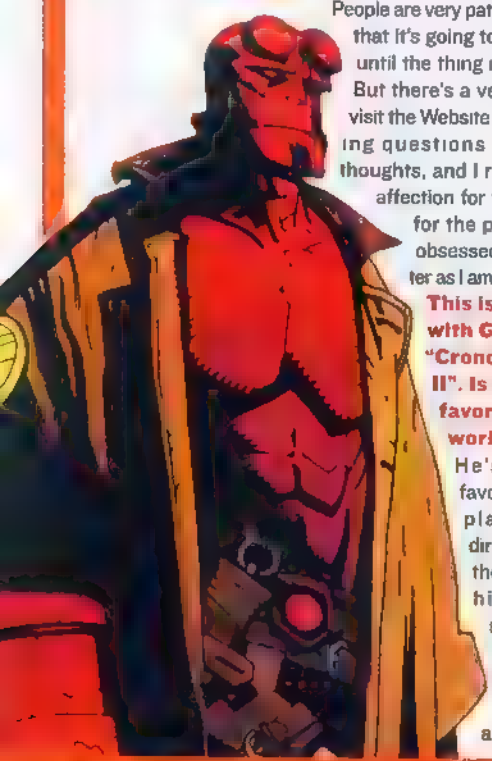
The man behind the 'Hellboy' makeup reflects on the heavenly experience of bringing this son of Satan to life

WIZARD: Filming for "Hellboy" wrapped in July. Can you describe the last day of filming in Prague? Was it sad, or celebratory?

PERLMAN: It was definitely both, and very intense. For me, this was a really singular experience unlike anything I've ever done. It's rare that I'm in such a prominent role in a big studio film, so I was more engaged on every level. It was six months of six days a week shooting, so we were all very tired—and when we finally came to the end, it was a great sense of relief. But then, there was this other aspect of what a privilege it was to be Hellboy and how much fun it was—and I knew I was going to have a hard time adjusting to not looking forward to that every day. And I *have* had a rough time with it, but it's been overshadowed by this phenomenal sense of honor and joy that I had during those six months.

Now that you're back in the States, are you getting overwhelmed by all the attention from diehard fans?

Not really. [Director] Guillermo [del Toro] is arduously concerned with having a great dialogue with the people who share his passion for Hellboy—and all those people weigh in on the Internet. So even during filming, there was this constant communication. We fed them aspects of the filming that wouldn't spoil it for them, but would allow them a sense of participation. And coming back [to the States], we've continued, but it's not any more or less intense. People are very patient, and they know that it's going to be seven months until the thing is truly completed. But there's a very positive vibe. I visit the Website every day, answering questions and sharing my thoughts, and I really have a great affection for the character, and for the people who are as obsessed with the character as I am. It's like a little club.



This is your third film with Guillermo, after "Cronos" and "Blade II". Is he one of your favorite directors to work with?

He's one of my favorite *people* on the planet, let alone directors! In terms of the sophistication of his eye and storytelling ability...he's going to have an incredible career. He's a world class filmmaker, and I'm very lucky to be a part of his evolution.

For Guillermo, "Hellboy" is his number one labor of love, and he put everything he had into this film. You never know how something like that will be received, but I know the spirit in which it was intended as it was unfolding—and it's pristine. It was a beautiful thing to be able to participate in, to see a guy who fought so hard to get this thing the way it should be, and then was pretty much given free reign. As the dailies began to filter into the hallowed halls back at Sony, we heard nothing except, "Keep up the good work!" It was almost as if nobody dared come and mess up our rhythm.

> **"This is cool! I get to beat up monsters!"**
>
> RON PERLMAN

When Guillermo first introduced you to Hellboy, were you sold from the very beginning, or did it take some convincing?

It was very difficult to get this thing greenlit, so neither of us allowed ourselves the luxury of totally buying into it. I refused to allow myself to invest too much emotionally into the Hellboy world, because it was such a longshot to get the picture made, and to get it made with me. But there was a gleam in his eye the minute he showed me Big Red for the first time. I remember the comic book store and everything about that night—and I have a sh—y memory!

So how long did it take for the cast and the crew to get used to seeing you in full makeup?

It got to the point where there was a lot of yawning [*Laughs*] But I don't think anybody really ever got tired of looking at this makeup, because it was gorgeous. It was an amazing achievement on the part of [makeup artist] Matt Rose. I watched video playback from beginning to end, and I never got tired of looking at it. It's incredibly sexy, fierce and vulnerable. It's got all the bells and whistles, man. It's cool!

Any major injuries over the course of the shoot?

Thank God, no. I don't think any of the stunt guys had any mishaps to speak of. You're going to get scrapes and bruises no matter what. I did this gag where I'm running onto a train that's coming toward me, and I broke a rib on one of the takes because the train hit me before I hit it. My eyes began to water, and I realized I couldn't get through the take, so I walked it off. And the following day, I found out that I did indeed have a cracked rib. So it's nice to be able to say I did the last five weeks of "Hellboy" with a broken rib.

Were the fight scenes fun to film?

[*Chuckles*] Yeah! They were great. It's like when you're a kid and you're playing war games, or cowboys and Indians, or anything involving physical quasi-violence. That's what they paid me to do! That was like, "Are you kidding? This is cool! I get to beat up monsters!" ■ **RICHARD HO**

NEW FRONTIER

EXCLUSIVE TO WIZARD!

Darwyn Cooke rockets into the past to explore the Silver Age origins of the Justice League

BY RICHARD HO

Darwyn Cooke went in search of a new frontier for the world's greatest heroes and he found one in the most unexpected place—their past.

"I saw how twisted the continuity had become over the last 50 years," explains the writer/artist. "So when DC asked me to come up with a JLA story, I said, 'What if we started in 1955, when Barry Allen [the Silver Age Flash] gets hit by lightning, and basically tell a real-time story that takes place over six years and ends in 1960 when the Justice League is formed?'"

Thus was born *DC: The New Frontier*, the six-issue opus debuting in January 2004 that's been three full years in the making. "This is my shot at a big epic superhero fable," proclaims Cooke (*Catwoman: Selina's Big Score*), who provides both scripts and art. "And at 380 pages, it's kind of a daunting proposition! But in the time it's taken for this to get off the ground, I've become incredibly attached to what my perception of these characters are."

Cooke's perception harkens back to an uncertain time in the history of the Justice League—and of the world itself. "The characters will be set against the backdrop of the Cold War, the race for space, the Communist blacklisting and all the other really intriguing stuff that was going on in the world," reveals the creator, who also cautions readers not to think of *New Frontier* as an alternate reality tale. "It's got nothing to do with today's continuity—but it's not an Elseworlds story, either. It's based on the original continuity and the original publishing schedule. We'll basically see new heroes come to the fore and the Silver Age version of the DCU emerge."

The chance to explore the earlier lives of the future Justice Leaguers also gave Cooke a chance to reverse a growing trend: Today's heroes have gotten a bit too dark for the creator's tastes, and one of his goals with *New Frontier* is to put heroes back on the pedestal. "I'm really going to deconstruct all of this anti-hero stuff," promises Cooke. "I want to bring back a sense of who these characters were and champion the idea of a hero again."

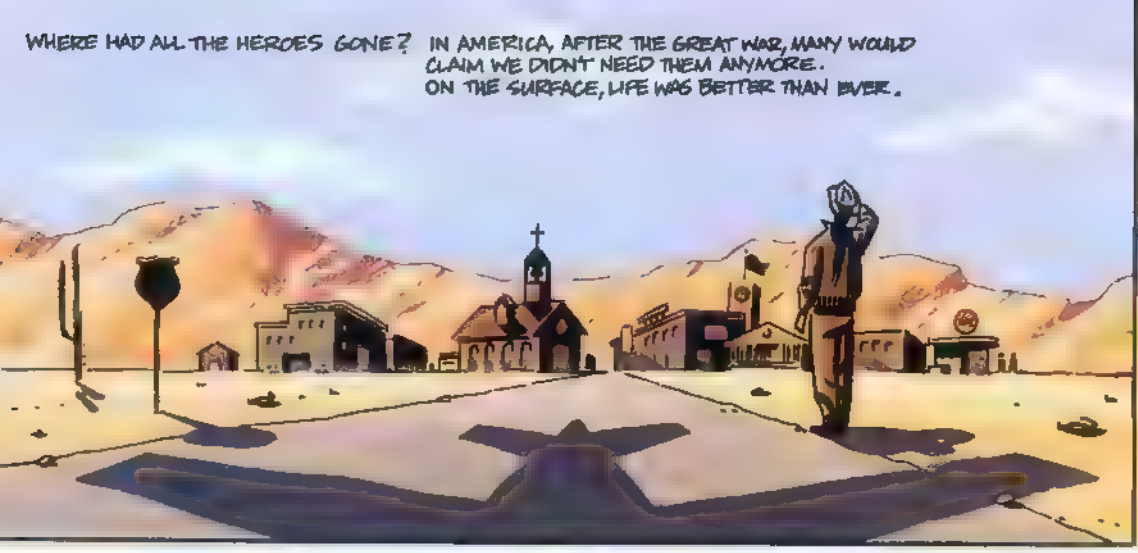
To accomplish that, Cooke plans to shine the spotlight on individual characters, but the story ultimately centers around the first Green Lantern, Hal Jordan. "He represents what I'd call modern American thinking—and as a Canadian, I'm using Hal as my vehicle to present that picture of America," notes the creator.

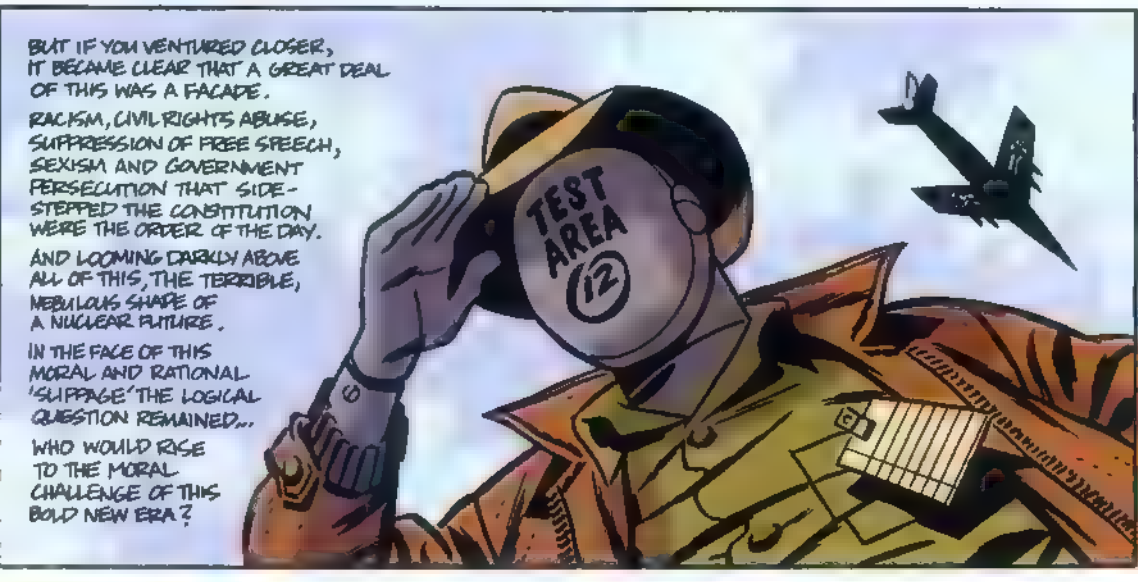
In order to give characters like Hal—as well as classic Silver Age characters like the Challengers of the Unknown and the Suicide Squad—a chance to shine, the larger icons will step into the background. "I didn't want to dwell on Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman, simply because of the way they overwhelm the other characters," explains Cooke. "*New Frontier* shows how these characters emerge, so it was very important to put the more well-known characters into a secondary light so that the new guys can carry the ball. And I found all kinds of really clever ways to take them out of the equation as the drama mounts!"

Adding to the drama will be a unifying threat so shocking that Cooke refuses to spoil the surprise. "I think I've managed to come up with a menace that is not only overwhelmingly horrifying," teases Cooke, "but locks into DCU continuity in a way that will really, really astonish diehard fans! When we hit the end of Book Five and it finally clicks what they're dealing with, I want the readers to get that payoff."

Looking for an early payoff? Step up to the edge of the *New Frontier* with eight pages of never-before-seen story created exclusively for *Wizard*!

DARWYN-ISM Writer/artist Darwyn Cooke sets out to turn the Silver Age on its heroic ear with *New Frontier*.


WHERE HAD ALL THE HEROES GONE?
IN AMERICA, AFTER THE GREAT WAR, MANY WOULD CLAIM WE DIDN'T NEED THEM ANYMORE.
ON THE SURFACE, LIFE WAS BETTER THAN EVER.


BUT IF YOU VENTURED CLOSER, IT BECAME CLEAR THAT A GREAT DEAL OF THIS WAS A FACADE.
RACISM, CIVIL RIGHTS ABUSE, SUPPRESSION OF FREE SPEECH, SEXISM AND GOVERNMENT PERSECUTION THAT SIDE-STEPPED THE CONSTITUTION WERE THE ORDER OF THE DAY.
AND LOOMING DARKLY ABOVE ALL OF THIS, THE TERRIBLE, NEBULOUS SHAPE OF A NUCLEAR FUTURE.
IN THE FACE OF THIS MORAL AND RATIONAL 'SLIPPAGE' THE LOGICAL QUESTION REMAINED...
WHO WOULD RISE TO THE MORAL CHALLENGE OF THIS BOLD NEW ERA?
TEST AREA 12

STORY & ART: DARWYN COOKE COLORS: DAVE STEWART ASST. EDITOR: VALERIE D'ORAZIO
EDITOR: MARK CHIARELLO

ADOLF HITLER'S CONTROL OF THE LEGENDARY 'SPEAR OF DESTINY' KEPT THE SUPER HEROES OUT OF THE GREAT WAR. IN THE END IT WAS MORTAL MEN AND WOMEN WHO CARRIED THE DAY IN THE BATTLEFIELDS OF EUROPE AND NORTH AFRICA.
THE CONCLUSION OF THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC WAS ANOTHER STORY. THE ADVENT OF NUCLEAR WARFARE GAVE MAN THE ABILITY TO DESTROY THE WORLD SEVERAL TIMES OVER.
WITHIN SCANT YEARS OF THEIR ALLIANCE TO DEFEAT THE NAZIS, THE CHASM BETWEEN AMERICAN AND RUSSIAN IDEOLOGIES DEEPENED.
WITH A DEADLY CORDON OF WARHEADS CREATING A STALEMATE, THE 'COLD WAR' BEGAN -- AN ERA OF ESPIONAGE, BLACKMAIL AND NATIONALISTIC PROPAGANDA.
ON THE HOMEFRONT, CONGRESSIONAL 'HEARINGS' SOUGHT TO ROOT OUT COMMUNIST INFILTRATORS AND OTHER CITIZENS GUILTY OF 'UNAMERICAN ACTIVITIES.' THE MASKED ADVENTURERS WERE BRANDED OUTLAWS AND SUBVERSIVES. FACED WITH PUBLIC UNMASKING, THE JUSTICE SOCIETY RETIRED. MANY OTHERS FOLLOWED SUIT.
BETTER Dead THAN Red!
WHAT ARE YOU HIDING?
BETTER Dead THAN Red!

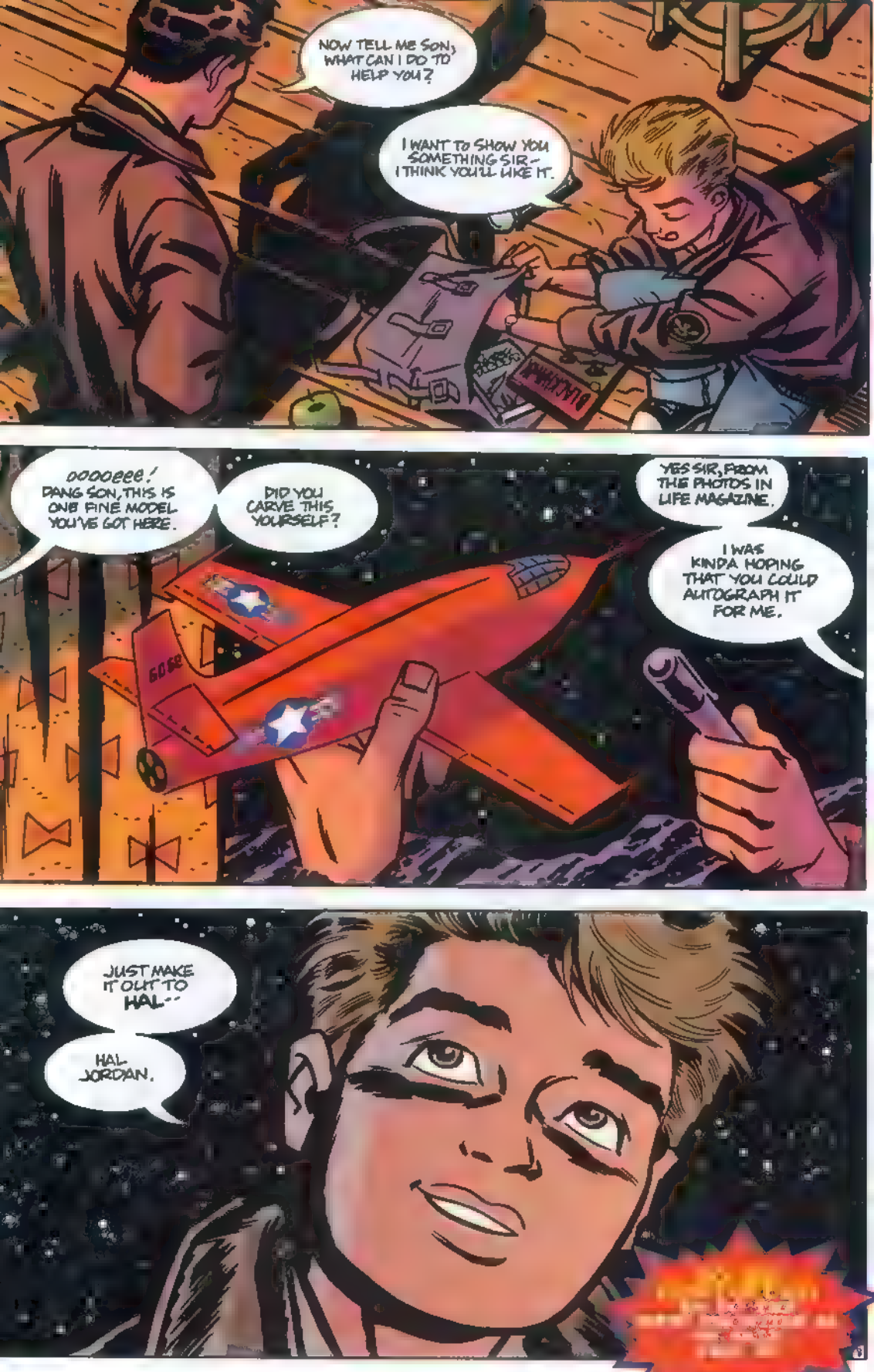
SOME WERE BEYOND THE CONTROL OF MANKIND.
OTHERS WERE SIMPLE-MINDED PATRIOTS, HAPPY TO WAVE 'SO LONG' AND GO PEDDLE THEIR PAPERS.
A RARE FEW DISPLAYED THE CUNNING AND THE CONVICTION TO EVADE CAPTURE.
DOMESTIC EMERGENCIES WERE HANDLED BY PARAMILITARY UNITS LIKE THE CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN, OR THE GOVERMENT-FINANCED TASK FORCE X, AKA "THE SUICIDE SQUAD."
IRONICALLY, IN PLACES LIKE FRENCH INDOCHINA U.S. FOREIGN POLICY WAS BEING COVERTLY ENFORCED BY AN IMMORTAL... AND AN ALIEN.
NUCLEAR WEAPONS RULED OUT LARGE SCALE CONFLICT AND THE SUPERPOWERS SOUGHT A FRESH ARENA IN WHICH TO WAGE THEIR IDEOLOGICAL BATTLE.

AND THEY FOUND IT IN THE HEAVENS ABOVE, TECHNOLOGY HAD MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR MAN TO CONSIDER REACHING BEYOND HIS EARTHLY CRADLE. FOR AMERICA, IT WAS A RACE TO AVOID COMMUNIST DOMINATION OF THE SKIES.
Aircraft
WHAT TYPE OF PERSON--WHAT NEW BREED OF HERO WOULD HAVE THE CHARACTER AND DARING TO LEAD AMERICA TO THE EDGE OF THIS NEW FRONTIER?
BELL Aircraft X-1A
X-1A

SO SHE'S TEARING AROUND THE ROOM AND LARRY'S SCREAMING 'HIT THE SILK! HIT THE SILK!!'
WELL NOW, LOOKY HERE, I TOLD Y'ALL THAT THE PILOTS SEEM TO BE GETTIN' YOUNGER EVERY YEAR!
OH, I'M NOT A PILOT MA'AM... AT LEAST, I--I MEAN, NOT YET ANYWAYS.
I KNOW IT'S LATE, AND I'M KINDA YOUNG TO BE HERE AND ALL... BUT I CAME TO SEE MR. YEAGER AND I READ IN LIFE MAGAZINE THAT HE COMES TO THE 'FLY INN' AFTER WORK. ARE YOU MISS BARNES??
MISS BARNES? AREN'T YOU A CAUTION?
CALL ME PANCHO, SWEETIE, EVERYBODY DOES. NOW I'LL IGNORE THE FACT THAT IT'S A SCHOOL NIGHT...

...IF YOU TELL ME WHAT A HALF-PINT LIKE YOURSELF WANTS WITH A GRUMPY OLD PECKERWOOD LIKE CHUCK YEAGER.
GOSH, MISS... PANCHO, HE'S THE GREATEST PILOT THAT EVER LIVED, AND I FIGURE TO BE A PILOT MYSELF AND, WELL JEEZ, I GUESS IT'S LIKE HE'S...
MY HERO.
THAT'S A FINE JACKET YOU HAVE THERE, YOUNG CAPTAIN.

YOU MIND TELLING ME WHERE YOU GOT IT?
IT--IT BELONGED TO MY DAD.
"I REMEMBER YOUR DADDY..."
"HE FLEW WITH YOU OVER EUROPE. MOM SAYS THAT HE SHOT DOWN SIX NAZI PLANES, SHE SAYS THAT HIS NICKNAME WAS 'THE FLYING MARTIN!' ON ACCOUNT'A' HIS NAME WAS MARTIN."
"HE WAS A DAMN FINE PILOT SON. YOU... YOUR MOM... YOU CAN BE MIGHTY PROUD OF HIM."
MY BUDDY


NOW TELL ME SON, WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP YOU?
I WANT TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING SIR - I THINK YOU'LL LIKE IT.
BLACKHAWK
OOOOeee! DANG SON, THIS IS ONE FINE MODEL YOU'VE GOT HERE.
DID YOU CARVE THIS YOURSELF?
YES SIR, FROM THE PHOTOS IN LIFE MAGAZINE.
I WAS KINDA HOPING THAT YOU COULD AUTOGRAPH IT FOR ME.
JUST MAKE IT OUT TO HAL--
HAL JORDAN.

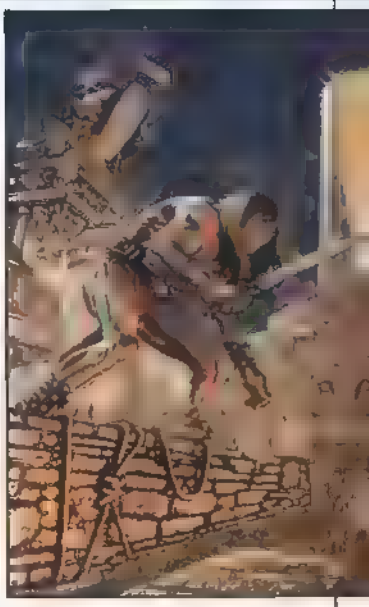
COMICS HOTTEST TREND:
CHARACTERS ON THE COMEBACK TRAIL

A BOOK OF THE MONTH SPECIAL EDITION

HEROES REBORN

CONAN (DARK HORSE)

Kurt Busiek hones an 'Ultimate' edge on comics' premier sword-slinging barbarian



After years on the sidelines, Conan the Barbarian preps for a return to gory glory.

The last survivor of the ancient land of Cimmeria slashes his way back into comics—after a 10-year span without an ongoing series—thanks to Dark Horse and the creative team of writer Kurt Busiek (*JLA/Avengers*) and artist Cary Nord (*Daredevil*). While the ongoing series kicks off in January, Busiek and Nord tease fans with Nov. 12's *Conan: The Legend* 25-cent one-shot, which sets up Conan's new adventures. But why is the time now ripe for a new era of smiting?

"Conan is a character who is so primal that I think he has the potential to be popular in any era," says Busiek. "He's all about the pure, unsullied barbarian up against corrupt, decaying civilization. That's a great fantasy image. This guy is a take-no-prisoners, don't-knuckle-under-anything fighter who claws his way to the top and eventually becomes king. Conan basically takes on city hall and wins."

Even though Conan is destined to become king in creator Robert E. Howard's series of novels, destiny will not play a major role in this series, which casts off the nearly 30 years of Marvel Comics continuity (although the Horse is currently reprinting those early Marvel issues in the recolored *Chronicles of Conan* trade paperbacks). So in an effort to make Conan more accessible to today's audience, Busiek plans on starting from the blood-drenched ground up.

"If you want to call what we're doing 'Ultimate Conan,' then go ahead," he laughs. "We are taking the original Howard stories as our foundation stone and nothing else. We're picking up Conan as he leaves Cimmeria for the first time heading northwest in search of adventure. When we get to the point where a Robert E. Howard story is there at that point in his life, we'll adapt it. And once that's done, we'll do a new story until it's time for the next one."

While fans can expect adaptations of classic Howard tales such as "The Frost Giant's Daughter" (issue #2) and "The God and the Bull" (the series' second arc where Conan first encounters Thoth-Amon, who becomes his greatest enemy), Busiek's gearing up for his own original Conan tales, which he promises won't skimp on the showdowns between barbarian and beasts that old-school Conan fans have come to expect.

"A large part of the appeal of Conan's world is the 'Weird Tales' aspect of it," says the scribe. "It's not about Conan fighting the monster of the month. But if he's dealing with a political struggle between a priesthood and a government, well, it certainly livens up the story when the priesthood has a giant ape on their side! So the monsters, the gods from the outer dark, the magic, the potions, the poisons, the creepy things, the carnivorous plants—all that stuff is gonna be part of the series."

However, one aspect from the early Marvel issues will *not* be part of this incarnation of Conan—the barbarian's long-winded exposition. Whereas legendary original *Conan* artist Barry Windsor-Smith was forced to often cram 10-12 panels on a comic page so an entire story could fit in one issue, Busiek and Nord aren't limited by the number of issues they have to tell a story, meaning Nord can go all out with cinematic, widescreen action.

"I think in the early Marvel comics, Conan talked a lot because somebody had to explain the plot," explains Busiek. "Since we're going to be giving the stories more room, there's a chance for us to show it all happen visually. You're not going to need so much of him going, 'Oh my God, I am looking at a giant spider.' You'll see a darker, moodier, more taciturn Conan."

Hey, if that means less "Crom!"-spouting and more skull cracking, you can count us in—fur loincloths and all! ■ JESSE THOMPSON

BARBARIAN AT THE GATE Conan proved to be a major cut-up wherever he went.

SUPREME POWER (MARVEL)

JMS pushes Squadron Supreme to the MAX to bring you one of the most hard-hitting, realistic superhero stories to date

Imagine a twisted reality where Ma and Pa Kent get busy in the broom closet just after baby Clark vaporizes his puppy with a blast of heat vision.

In *Supreme Power*, the orphaned alien will grow up to be Hyperion, trapped in a realistic take on familiar archetypes. In fact, this mature readers book delivers a superhero story so credible, you'll be checking CNN for updates.

Writer J. Michael Straczynski reteams with his *Midnight Nation* artist Gary Frank to re-imagine writer Mark Gruenwald's groundbreaking JLA riff *Squadron Supreme*. The 1985 mini-series offered Hyperion, Dr. Spectrum, Nighthawk and Power Princess—as the Marvel versions of DC heavy hitters Superman, Green Lantern, Batman and Wonder Woman, respectively—taking control of their world to save it from total ruin. Straczynski and Frank offer their contemporary spin on these heroes with the creative freedom of the MAX line.

In *Supreme Power* #1, Mark Milton, a.k.a. "Hyperion," crash lands on Earth from a destination unknown. No sooner does a young couple rush to his rescue than Uncle Sam storms in (with guns blazing) to see that the alien-child is raised like a child—or soldier—of the United States. Unbeknownst to young Mark, as he's groomed in an isolated "Truman Show"-esque setting with federal agents posing as his parents, a number of other uniquely gifted individuals begins to surface as a result of his presence.

"I wanted to set up Mark as our prime mover—the one key incident that changes the world," explains Straczynski. "His entry into our real world beings to skew things."

In some cases, it's what Mark brought with him that skews events, like the gem that powered his ship and responds to a person's thoughts. In issue #2, powered by the will of the ultra-disciplined Corporal Joe Ledger, the gem could be the most powerful weapon on Earth.

That weapon may come in handy as others outside of the Pentagon's watchful eye begin to gain powers, starting in issue #2, such as the boy in Georgia who sends sonic booms echoing as he races across the countryside; and a mother and child who eagerly await the return of an Amazonian "Princess;" elsewhere, a woman drowns herself and her hideously deformed newborn—but the child can miraculously breathe underwater; and a group of liquored-up racists fire a 12-gauge into both his parents right before young Kyle Richmond's eyes.

"Sooner or later we're going to start seeing people coming on the scene who, triggered by Mark's arrival, don't choose to go the heroic way," revealed Straczynski.

One such figure is Richmond, who raises the bar for vigilantism with an especially brutal demonstration of street justice in issue #4, which may put him at odds with the moralistic Hyperion.

"It's certainly going to be a dicey relationship in more than one respect," teased Straczynski.

Theirs is one of the many too-hot-for-PG conflicts that lights this book on fire. And when these hard-boiled heroes get pissed, there's no Comic Code to tell them to pull their punches!

"[Milton] is under tremendous stress, which will only continue to build," hinted Straczynski. "And sooner or later, that stress is going to come out."

Compared to the devastation coming up, Mark's puppy got off easy! ■ **TODD CASEY**

PATRIOTIC HYPE The other kids all mocked Hyperion for leading the parade—until he vaporized them all!

H-E-R-O (DC COMICS)

Regular folks struggle with superpowers in DC's new spin on the camp classic 'Dial H for Hero'

With his latest project, writer Will Pfeifer discovered a new way to spell entertainment: *H-E-R-O*.

Pfeifer and artist Kano (*Action Comics*) take the premise of DC's classic goofball title *Dial "H" for Hero*—where young kids become superheroes by dialing "H-E-R-O" on a mysterious alien artifact—and turn it on its ear with a vicious twist by making *the device* the star of the new series; in *H-E-R-O*, everyone and anyone can possess superpowers, and the results range from hilarious to heartbreaking, from sinister to satirical.

"We came up with the hook that the dial wouldn't be held by one person," explains Pfeifer. "It would work its way around and jump from person to person. That way, you can get more imaginative with the stories and focus on different characters. I think the concept of using the dial to give an average person superpowers was always pretty strong, but the stories from the 1960s and 1980s were simpler, shorter and less complex. For it to work now in the 21st century, it's important to give it an extra spin."

With that extra spin, positive word of mouth spread like wildfire, and an online money-back offer by Geoff Johns (*Flash, Teen Titans*) only boosted the book's buzz. But the proof is in the pudding, so to speak; Johns wouldn't have given the book a free plug if it wasn't good, and *H-E-R-O* joins the ranks of *Y: The Last Man* and *100 Bullets* as one of the most original concepts on the racks today.

The first arc, "Powers and Abilities" (on sale now in trade form), tells "a standard new-guy-gets-super-powers-and-how-he-deals-with-them" story, according to Pfeifer, but it's the details that make this tale rise above the routine "great power, great responsibility" motif. Our hero, Jerry Feldon, the product of a broken home and dead-end existence, calls a suicide hotline to tell the story of his wayward adventures with superpowers.

His first time out, as the awe-inspiring Afterburner, Jerry incorrectly assumes he's invulnerable and tries to stop a speeding SUV, only to wind up a mangled mess. Jerry continues his descent into despair after more failed super-fiascos, such as almost killing a drug dealer and bungling a robbery attempt that gets the object of his affection, a young girl named Molly with an obsession for Superman, shot during the crime!

After a touching and clever resolution to that story, the device switches hands in ensuing issues: hard-driving executive Matt Allen lets his entire life fall apart when he becomes addicted to the device (issue #5); in issue #6, Matt's estranged daughter Andrea causes chaos at school when she lets her new friends in on the secret; a group of 20-something slackers get into major trouble (and cause major laughter), when they use the H-E-R-O machine to create a superpowered "Jackass" knockoff for the Internet (#7-#8); and a would-be supervillain learns that crime doesn't pay when you set up shop in Gotham City (#9-#10)!

"This book is really my statement on superheroes and villains," explains Pfeifer. "What would you do if you could do anything? Would you make the right choices? I like to put people in situations where they have to rise to the moment."

And there's plenty more great moments to come in future issues of *H-E-R-O*. December's issue #11 takes a time travel break to tell the story of a caveman's prehistoric encounter with the dial, and to kick off 2004, issues #12-#14 whip up a side-splitting arc when a young man gets the device and becomes a super*heroine*!

But those aren't the only surprises on tap: Pfeifer plans on folding old *Dial "H"* continuity into his new take by bringing back Chris and Vicki, the two youngsters from the '80s incarnation of the book, as well as original dial-wielder, Robbie Reed, who fans learned in issue #7 was now a hardened convict searching for the device! "Robbie will be more and more a part of the story, because we wanted a thread to tie the book together," noted Pfeifer.

However Pfeifer keeps this kickass series together, we're hoping *H-E-R-O* winds up as a long distance call.

■ **ANDY SERWIN**

H-E-R-O WORSHIP You never see Batman or Superman kickin' it in a hot tub full o' honeys—suckers!

NEW MUTANTS (MARVEL)

Marvel's revamped junior mutants bring 'O.C.'-style teen drama to the X-Mansion

Ever wonder how the kids from "Dawson's Creek" would deal with mutant powers? Or what would happen if a fleet of Sentinels stormed "The O.C."? Then you've got an idea what to expect from Marvel's *New Mutants*.

Aside from the usual problems that come with adolescence—homework, hormones and parents—the teen stars of *New Mutants* have a few extra things to worry about: surviving attacks from mutant-hating radicals, getting tossed in jail or accidentally turning a parent into a pile of ash.

Organized by original New Mutant Dani Moonstar (Psyche) and Professor X, the latest incarnation of the teen X-team features a new wave of mutant students. Series writers Nunzio DeFilippis and Christina Weir (*Skinwalker*) have created a group of teenage mutants with personalities as defined as their powers, from Sofia, an outgoing, enthusiastic Venezuelan teen who can control the wind, to Kevin, an introverted Atlanta art student who can no longer sculpt because his power destroys any organic material with the slightest touch.

The original New Mutants—whose first series ran from 1983-1990—came about after Professor X, believing the X-Men had perished in battle, brought together Cannonball, Psyche, Sunspot, Karma and Wolfsbane to create a new class of X-Men trainees and students. It's that original *New Mutants* concept of new students dealing with fledgling mutant powers that appealed to married co-writers DeFilippis and Weir, and helped form the core concept for the current book.

"The thing about *New Mutants* that made it unique was that it was teenagers in a vaguely school-like setting," DeFilippis says. "They were going through changes, like any teens. Their true ambition was to simply learn how to cope."

DeFilippis and Weir—with the help of artists Keron Grant, Mark Robinson and cover artist Josh Middleton—inject the worn out "junior" X-team concept with a sense of isolation and teenage anxiety that anyone who's lived through high school can relate to. While there will be some high adventure in the book, the writers are clear about one thing: The New Mutants are *not* a traditional X-group.

"Our kids are not a team," Weir stresses. "They're a group of friends. After the initial setup, the students are going to have to figure out where they fit in at Xavier's. It's a big place now. There are cliques and all the complicated social dynamics that come with high school."

As the first arc winds down, the kids face off against Donald Pierce and his band of cyborg Reavers. Pierce, in an effort to train a new band of Reavers, attacks Sofia's father in New York, drawing the New Mutants out of the school to serve as a test for his new lackeys. The battle has a lasting effect on the students and sets the stage for the rest of the series.

"We made it clear what ties these kids together," Weir explains. "It's the school's mentor system—all of these kids have the same advisor and have a shared experience in the battle with Donald Pierce. They stick together by choice, not by assignment."

The second arc kicks up the teen trauma as the students try to deal with their new surroundings. The experience will give the group a chance to learn what the school has to offer—friends, safety and a little romance, Weir notes.

With November's *New Mutants* #7, past *Wizard* cover contest winner Carlo Barberi (*Sins of Youth: JLA Jr.*) and Chris Bachalo (*New X-Men*) will be taking over as artist and cover artist respectively. But the new art team won't be the only new addition to the book, DeFilippis says.

"We'll be introducing a new character, Noriko Ashida," DeFilippis hinted. "She is the rebel, the one who goes it alone and doesn't really care what anyone thinks of her."

Teen angst, mutant powers and the X-Men as faculty constitute only a small part of the book's appeal, Weir points out. It's not the villains and costumes that propel this book; it's the characters and how they interact, the writing team emphasizes.

"Teen soap opera! We want to do a teens in high school book that's also a mutant book," Weir reiterated. "It's not superheroics. It's the day-to-day lives of young characters made more complicated by genetic mutation." ■ **ALEX SEGURA JR.**

DOG DAYS AT XAVIER'S With all the dog and wolf mutants running around, housebreaking became a top priority around the mansion.

For more comeback comics, including DC/Vertigo's The Losers, *go to* wizardworld.com!

KILLING JOKE A nice long soak in a hot bath oughtta clear up Wolverine's aches and pains from *this* little scrap.

LOGAN'S DONE

Writer Paul Jenkins makes a killing on 'Wolverine: The End,' but still finds time to resurrect Marvel's most absurd villains

By Richard Ho

He may be a Brit, but with all the mileage he's logged with a certain hairy X-Man, you'd swear Paul Jenkins was a full-blooded Canadian.

And with November's *Wolverine: The End*, the scribe's personal Logan log now spans the length of the hero's life, from his final days all the way back to the beginning (in Jenkins' *Origin* from 2001). The million-dollar question is, will this truly be The End? • "We definitely have a plan," he teases. "But I can't tell you whether he's going to live or die. You'll find out, otherwise it'll blow it." • But maybe with some extra prodding, we can get more details out of Jenkins. Behind it all, we know he's dying to tell you.

WIZARD: Would you say that you're a "Wolvie expert"?

JENKINS: Oof! There's no way to *be* a Wolverine expert. I've just added my thoughts and voice to the character, and it's happened to have been in some pretty big projects

Is the Canuck a favorite character of yours?

I have very few favorite characters, because I love writing. I don't care who it is. I always used to say that you could give someone like Alan Moore a project like a Barbie comic, and he'd do something interesting with it. And I try to do that myself. I like Wolverine because I can sort of relate to him—*Origin* was based a little bit on my own upbringing in England.

Which was harder to write, the first Logan story or the last?

The first.

Because of expectations?

No. Partly yes, but I'm not that worried about those expectations. I've heard it many times: You must have been afraid, or it must have been scary to do that. No, I don't care. [*Origin*] was a collaborative thing with other people and I tried to fit in various aspects of what we wanted to do, but still tell a good story—that was really difficult. Whereas with *The End*, [Marvel] asked me, "What's your take on the definitive aspect of this character?"

Since this story takes place roughly 75 years in the future, will any familiar characters show up?

Yes. What we've done is set it up as a natural extension of what we are right now, because that's what it's going to be. I guarantee in 75 years, everybody will still be wearing denim jeans. It's not like "Star Trek." There aren't flying cars everywhere, it's just an interesting place. Where are mutants at that point, 75 years down the line? Are they accepted? My answer to that—and I kind of disagreed with [a Marvel editor] who said they're more accepted—is, no way! It's like the emancipation of black America. The old ways die hard. We have a couple of familiar characters show up, but I can't tell you which ones, because one of them is quite a surprise. And I know that the big guess will be Sabretooth. But you'll just have to wait to find out!

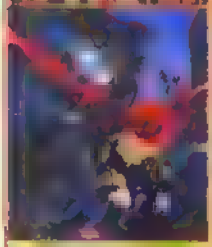
What's the theme of *The End*?

Wolverine's spent his life on an eternal search to belong. When you get towards the end of your life, do you regret

THE BEGINNING OF 'THE END'

DAYS OF FUTURE PAST (Marvel) Nothing says "the end" like "death," and there's plenty of it in this classic X-Men tale. In an effort to prevent a horrible future in which Sentinels have driven mutants to the verge of extinction, an older, wiser Kitty travels back in time to stop the assassination of Senator Robert Kelly. She succeeds—but not before readers witness Wolverine, Colossus and Storm joining their fallen comrades on the tombstones of the future.

THE GOLDEN AGE (DC) In this Elseworlds tale that ends the Golden Age of DC heroes, the JSA and numerous other World War II superheroes face off one last time against the Ultra-Humanite (in the form of Mr. America) and Adolf Hitler, who's had his brain placed in the body of one of the most powerful beings on the planet—Dyna-Man. In the last, fierce, no-holds-barred battle the Golden Age Green Lantern dons his ring one last time to make a final stand, only to fall like so many of his comrades.



THE LAST AVENGERS STORY (Marvel) The current Avengers have retired or fallen in battle long ago, but their successors carry on the legacy—until a giant bomb kills them all! Writer Peter David and painter Ariel Olivetti pull the aging Ant Man, Hawkeye, Mockingbird and other war-worn heroes out of retirement to fight an end-all battle against Ultron, the Grim Reaper and Kang.

HULK: FUTURE IMPERFECT (Marvel) The Hulk has always walked the line between hero and monster—but in this imperfect future, the Green Goliath discovers just how much of a monster he can be! Along with Rick Jones and his great granddaughter Jania, the Hulk battles against the ruthless Maestro, a malevolent version of himself that rules the world with an iron fist. In the end, it takes a trip back in time to the gamma bomb explosion of the Hulk's origin to remove the radioactive tyrant from power.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE MAN OF TOMORROW? (DC) Doomsday may have killed Superman, but in 1986, Alan Moore beat him to the punch. After revealing the fate of Jimmy Olsen, Bizzaro, Lois Lane and the rest of Superman's friends and foes, Moore puts a definitive end to the Man of Steel in battle with his deadliest enemy—and it's not Lex Luthor!

■ THE WIZARD STAFF

that you never found the thing that you were looking for? Or do you look back and say that the search itself was what made your life worthwhile?

So, will Wolverine really die?

You'll find out! If he *does* die, people are going to be very disappointed that they already knew it. And if he doesn't, they'll be very disappointed if they knew that too. The importance of the story centers around, "Have we said the thing about Wolverine that always needed to be said?"

You're also saying a lot about villains in *Spectacular Spider-Man*. After Venom, what other baddies can we expect?

Oh, we've got some good ones! The next arc [starting with November's issue #6] will be Dr. Octopus, and after that we've got the Lizard. Following that, I have plans for Carnage, Electro, Hobgoblin and Vulture. And then I have a few that will have people scratching their heads. Understand, I'm not a comic book historian, so I'm finding a lot of villains and going, "Oh my God, that's awesome!" [*Laughs*] There's Mindworm and Hypno-Hustler, and my new favorite called Big Wheel, who's this guy in the middle of a big wheel that runs around crushing people! [*Laughs*] What a great, freaking hilarious idea!

STICKY SITUATION Look out Spidey—Jenkins aims to dump your lamest foes on you in '04.

What's happening with your Top Cow book, *The Darkness*?

I gotta tell you, *The Darkness* is my favorite book to write. Because [series star] Jackie Estacado can't have sex [or his powers will kill him], it was like he couldn't find love. So we made that conflict *real*—we killed his girl, and he never had a chance to tell her he loved her. Jackie's driven by his need to belong, and the only family he's got is the mafia. And every single day he's going to be thinking about what he lost, which is a terrible tragedy. I don't know why it is, but I really just love writing sad stories.

How do you research mafia dialogue?

I actually have a couple of experiences [*laughs*]. Cousin Paulie in the book was based on my big encounter with the mob. I was invited to dinner as a guest of honor by a guy who's this huge comic book fan. So we're hanging out, and I'm just typical me, "Hello mate!" In comes this guy, and he's about 4-foot-10, and his name is Uncle Paulie, and they all run over to him. He's got a fur coat on, and huge rings on his fingers. Well f--- me if I don't end up sitting at the table next to Uncle Paulie, and we start talking about soccer. And he's going off about England, "Oh they're crap, they didn't even qualify for the last World Cup," and I'm like, "Well what about Italy, man? They're a bunch of f---ing crooks, man! Yeah, they're all mafia, man, they're mob all the way!" [*Laughs*] And he got such a kick out of me. Someone said to me after, "Don't you know who that is? That's f---ing Uncle Paulie! I can't believe you're getting on so well with him, he doesn't really like anybody!" [*Laughs*] Thank God he thought I was funny! Because here I am, completely oblivious to the fact that I'm about to get a horse's head in my bed.

Staff writer Richard Ho served four years as the Hypno-Hustler.

ALEX UNCENSORED

Comics' premier painter candidly answers fans' questions with topics ranging from 'Marvels 2' to Alan Moore to flying back in time to stop Kevin Smith

RED

BY CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE

THREE'S COMPANY The above image is actually three different, connected *Wizard* covers by Ross.

Being in the hot seat's nothing new to Alex Ross. Having spent more than a decade painting some of the most remarkable comic images ever seen, dabbling in Hollywood (he did a poster for the Academy Awards) and graciously participating in the no fewer than three books that have been written about him (two *Wizard* Alex Ross specials and October's *Mythology: The DC Art of Alex Ross*), the artist's developed a certain familiarity with both the act of being interviewed and the art of inquisition.

Hell, Ross has spent more time on the grill than a well-done hamburger at a Fourth of July barbecue, and with November's release of *JLA: Liberty and Justice*, his long-awaited return to fully painted superheroes-in-action-against-an-unspeakable-menace storytelling ("with word balloons," the artist points out), the microphones of the press will once again be thrust in his face.

Though he bears concerns that "shooting his mouth off" could be counterproductive ("I'm worried about running my mouth off in a way that seems bitter"), there really is no question too tough, no subject too sacred for Ross to tackle. Good thing too, because *Wizard*—with a little help from **www.wizarduniverse.com**—opened the floor to the fans for this interview, soliciting their questions for the industry's most prominent painter and 10-time Wizard Fan Award winner. Get ready for pure fan-demonium!

Why aren't you a part of the upcoming *Marvels* sequel *Eye of the Camera*? —Christopher Pitts, Oklahoma City, Okla.

ROSS: In truth, I wasn't really offered the chance to be a part of it. [Writer] Kurt [Busiek] called and asked if I'd want to do covers and, from the call, I got the impression that the project was well underway by the time I was hearing about it. I also got the impression it was going to happen no matter what I decided, which to me suggests I was not an essential component.

When will you put out a series with your own characters? —Erick Cruz, erickm@uslogisticsinc.com

Someday in the future. I look towards others to basically prove there's a strong enough market reception for this. I have lots of things I've created in the last few years that I've yet to introduce; some of which I might give to established company situations that aren't retreads of classic characters and some I see, one day, to do independently. The era that was benefiting the Image Comics creators 12 years ago isn't around now. All people would ask me [if I were to do an independent project] is, "When are you going to work for Marvel and DC again?" There's been a definite shift in fandom, where questions of "Alex, when are you going to create something of your own?" have diminished in favor of "Alex, when are you going to work on Spider-Man again?"

The early- to mid-1990s could be considered an artist dominated timeframe. In recent years, there's been more attention paid to the writers' dynamic. What issues or creators do you think led to that shift? —Ryan Davies, Manahawkin, N.J.

Probably, in good part, the artists that struck out with very little preparation intending to become writers themselves, like [Rob] Liefeld and [Todd] McFarlane. When they were overreaching their bounds, they sort of pointed out the worth of the other side of the talent pool, then many different writers—everybody from Garth Ennis to Warren Ellis—took strong advantage of the shift going toward writers being the Great White Hope.

Will DC collect all of your tabloid-sized graphic novels in a hardcover or trade paperback form? —Farhat Jamal Ahmad, fjahmad@tds.net

Believe it or not, yes, but they're highly pressuring me to make the format the size of a comic book. It'd be a hardcover, but the format they'd like is one that's really tiny—the size of a comic book. I've been told about a million times that they could sell it into any number of additional places if it was a smaller size. I believe that whatever we do will be smaller, but I wouldn't participate if it weren't some greater size than what you normally get.

What titles do you read regularly? —Andrew Hogan, Bossier City, La.

I read a lot of the mainstay titles these days. I read a lot of Brian Michael Bendis' stuff, as well as all of Alan Moore's wor of Geoff Johns' work. By name, I read things like *Alias*, *JSA*. He doesn't put out a monthly book, but I can also ators like Chris Ware [*Jimmy Corrigan*], especially. Wh produces something, that's always something I take no

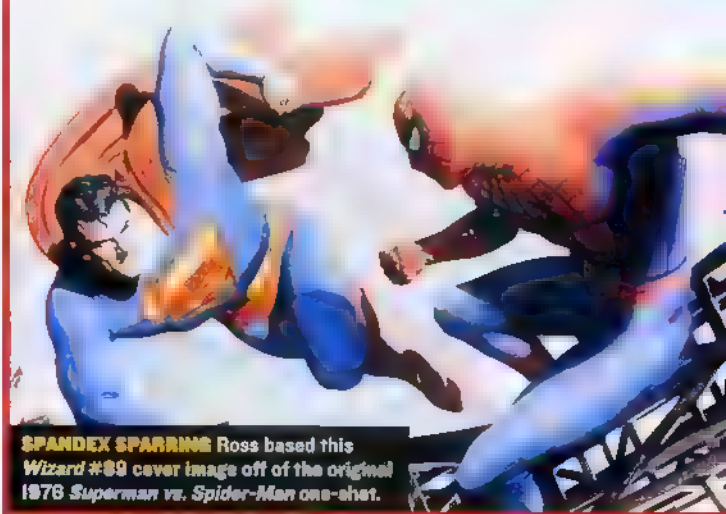
Have you ever thought of doing some penciling for co than the usual painting? —Jim Baldessari, South Pla

With penciling, I imagine I may someday do a project t ciled by me, but my greater ambition is to still take adv the painted look that my work maintains.

A lot of really high-quality, realistic pencilers are w very little attention on what they do, people like J.H. W John Paul Leon, Stuart Immonen. I have to figure the gotten the kind of reception I have in the business has the superficial gloss that is the painted, photo-realistic I to just give that up for the sake of showing how I pen

"That's my No. 1 favorite comi

—ROSS ON 'SUPERMAN VS. SPIDER



SPANDEX SPARRING Ross based this *Wizard* #89 cover image off of the original 1976 *Superman vs. Spider-Man* one-shot.

don't trust the audience out there to buy it.

I've heard *Kingdom Come* compared to something Al wrote called "Twilight of the Superheroes." Did you e —Francis Gilly, Tacoma, Wash.

Yeah. But just so everybody knows, I wrote 40 pages line for *Kingdom Come*, which included most of the fundamental breakdown moments—the battle betwe Superman and Captain Marvel, the whole Superman the farm at the beginning, my dad as the centerpoint with the Spectre and certainly the whole thing with t hero civil war—before I'd ever heard of "Twilight." *Ki Come* had come from other inspirations, stretched a everything from *Books of Magic* to *Dark Knight* to *W* and *Miracleman*. "Twilight" was completely unfamilia was unpublished, certainly—and the first writer I wo my *Kingdom Come* story ideas to, James Robinson, first one to bring it to my attention.

I read "Twilight" before *Kingdom Come* came out, b were no ideas that were taken from it. Where there are

they are just that—similarities. There's very little similarity in terms of intent, in terms of how the stories are being told and what goals they have in mind. Still, there are people out there who probably got a copy of "Twilight," put two and two together and figured one's a rip-off of the other. It's not. If anything [*laughs*], *Kingdom Come*'s a rip-off of *Miracleman*.

Will there be more *Battle of the Planets* [below] after the current series is done? —Peter Storzenecker, petestorz19@hotmail.com

I'm not sure. Our intentions are to continue, to follow up the series with an expanded cast, including some of the first-ever characters added to the G-Force lineup.

Will you ever do a monthly book like Jim Lee has on *Batman*? —Andy Dorris, MrPickles1982@aol.com

Yes. I would go more for bimonthly, but since you should be used to that with *The Ultimates*, don't give me a hard time.

Do you feel your popularity's waned without an epic *Kingdom Come*-type mini-series featuring A-list characters over the past year or so? —Bobby Heath, San Diego, Calif.

Definitely "or so." As much as *Kingdom Come* is the project that I can stand behind as a cornerstone of my career, it has only served to plague all the years since. It's basically what everyone wants from me and has consistently wanted from me for the last seven years. I could say that my pretensions are to return to form and do something akin to this, not necessarily doing a *Kingdom Come* sequel, but to do traditional, sequential, painted comics in comic format with heroes fighting other similarly costumed characters.

Since I did *Kingdom Come*, I've been itching to do more things like it, but I had to wax my bone—can I say that?—with all those big books that I had to run through.

If you had the Silver Age Superman's power to fly against the axis of the Earth and travel back in time, how would you have Kevin Smith rewrite the infamous "Malirats" Stan Lee scene? —Darcy Walsh, Thorburn, Nova Scotia

[*Laughs*] If I could do it, I would probably just not have Stan show up in the movie. I'm assuming people have heard me

KNOW IT ALL

FIVE THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT ALEX ROSS

At age 10, Ross drew an adaptation of his favorite comic book movie: "Flash Gordon" (1980). "I drew the entire thing from memory, in color, with whatever my level of art was at the time," remembers Ross. "I subsequently threw it out because I didn't feel it was up to my standards anymore, but it must have been, like, 100 pages."

For his dream creative team, Ross offers the following: "The writer: Alan Moore. The artist: Alex Ross. The character: Jesus Christ."

Ross' annual Halloween parties seem to bring out everyone's creative sides—one friend once rigged up a motorized (wheeled) Goblin Glider as an accessory to a Green Goblin costume. As for Ross himself, he's most recently been Superman, Space Ghost, Spider-Man, Flash Gordon (movie style), The Tick and The Phantom.

Ross originally designed Magog from *Kingdom Come* as a dig at Rob Liefeld. "[Magog] was Cable with Shatterstar's helmet with these ram horns and a staff from 'Stargate,'" says Ross. "It was this hodge-podge of crap that was meant to be a stab at the Rob Liefeld-style of superhero. Funnily enough, Rob recognized it and loved the idea that he was in *Kingdom Come* as a metaphor."

Ross recently had an epiphany: "At the age of 33," he says, "I'm about right on the money of where Superman is normally supposed to be. I'm getting older than the characters I've been following my whole life. When did I get old?"

RIDDLE ME THIS

Every fan has a favorite character and, judging from your e-mails, most of you want to know when Ross will get around to tackling that close-to-your-heart hero/concept in a massive, *Kingdom Come*-esque epic. We ran some of those properties past the industry's foremost painter to see what he'd have to say...

STAR WARS "If Darth Vader meets up with Superman anytime soon, I'd love to paint it."

DANGER GIRL "I'd like to believe I can do attractive women illustrations as well as anything I can illustrate well, but my pretension is never to be a good 'girl artist.' I'll leave that to the Adam Hughes and Scott Campbells of the world."

TRANSFORMERS "One of the things I hate the most to have to draw is cars, and since you're talking about big, flat planes of metal walking around...I don't think so. The only real nostalgia aspect it would have at this point would be the Shogun Warriors from the 1970s. Sorry, guys. I'm a different generation."

GHOST RIDER "I actually have a redesigned concept for him. I was asked by [*Earth X* writer] Jim Krueger to see if I could come up with a modern costume design for him that would be a step away from what he's been under the more [former *GR* artist] Mark Texeira version."

DANGER GIRL

LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES "Love 'em. Especially the bikini costumes from the '70s. I would love to do a project with them someday."

HULK "Haven't really taken my time with the Hulk yet. I was asked to do some design work for the 'Hulk' film a good two years before it would get made—nothing materialized on that, but yeah, I've got to do stuff with the Hulk."

WOLVERINE "The movie inspired me to want to become involved with the X-Men comics and the unused designs I did for the new costumes has prompted me to really want to put my hand to them one day. With any luck, that's a dream I'll see fulfilled, and Wolverine will be a big part of that."

BOB ROSS "The 'lovely little cloud' guy? He's dead, isn't he? We're not related. He brought joy to so many—do we really need to mock him?" ■ CL

WOLVERINE

bitch about Stan not giving proper credit to his [early Marvel Comics] co-collaborators in "Mallrats." If you haven't caught on yet to the lack of fair play that's existed in the history of who created what at Marvel or to the lack of acknowledgement that's gone on long, long before now, you'll never understand why I got worked up about this.

KINGDOM COME

What would your sequel to *Kingdom Come* be about? How would it differ from *The Kingdom*? —Rich Golwacki, Rio Rancho, N.M.

The world that the DC characters inhabit wouldn't be as dramatic as it had been leading up to *Kingdom Come*. There wouldn't be these earth-shattering emergencies that would demand the heroes band together again—that would undermine the whole point of that story being the last great tale of the DC superhero universe.

In my mind, I've been following that project with things that are thematically born from following it. *Uncle Sam* was trying to take the relevance of how I could get closer to a real life versus iconic relationship within comics and tell something valid to the culture we live in today. From that point, I wanted to return to the heroes that I fell much more deeply in love with during *Kingdom Come* and I took them one at a time, through four books relating to the world that we do live in, dealing with the issues of our day.

Liberty and Justice is sort of the furthest fan payoff from that. For me, at least. In a way, everything I've done—including especially doing the Marvel version of the same—has built upon the *Kingdom Come* aesthetic.

What was the most challenging painting you've ever done? —Kellie Smith, Virginia Beach, Va.

Probably the *Crisis* [*on Infinite Earths* TPB] cover, but that was more challenging mostly in terms of the time involved. [***Editor's note.*** *Ross painted over George Pérez's pencils of over 500 DC characters.*]

What are your Top Five comics of all time? —Walter B. Chesney, Kissimmee, Fla.

Superman vs. Spider-Man. That's probably No. 1 for me. *Miracleman*. *Watchmen*. "The Death of Gwen Stacy" issue of *Spider-Man* [*Amazing* #121]. *Crisis*.

If there was a war between DC and Marvel, which side you be a general for? —Dafyyd Jones, Sparta, N.J.

[*Laughs*] I'd declare conscientious objector status. There's been too much fighting already.

Freelance writer Christopher Lawrence found Alex Ross unreceptive to his idea for an Apache Chief tabloid-sized one-shot

ULTIMATE FF

Brian Michael Bendis, Mark Millar and Adam Kubert comprise the Ultimate dream team for a back-to-basics version of Fantastic Four

BY MIKE COTTON

When Mark Millar agreed to team up with Brian Michael Bendis as co-writer of Marvel's upcoming *Ultimate Fantastic Four*, he knew there were only two possible outcomes.

"It's one of those things that could either be a complete f---ing catastrophe or work out pretty well," says the *Ultimates* scribe, who plots the series while Bendis (*Ultimate Spider-Man*) provides the script. "Bendis and I couldn't have two more different styles, but luckily it worked out. The 48-hour Marvel summit on *Ultimate Fantastic Four* [held in July] was just a barrage of ideas, and I woke up exhausted the next morning. Eventually we came up with something everyone liked."

Fans will certainly be pleased as both writers are joined by penciler Adam Kubert (the upcoming *Daredevil: The Target* #2) as well as *Ultimates* artist Bryan Hitch, who designed all the main characters and their costumes and will provide covers starting with December's *Ultimate Fantastic Four* #1.

For Millar and Bendis, working together for the first time on Marvel's First Family has been an interesting experiment.

"I type up a reasonably tight plot with dialogue suggestions and descriptions—especially with the more action-packed panels—then Brian comes in and ignores everything he doesn't like and then I complain to him," laughs Millar. "We end up with something quite good. It's not nearly as simple as just a plot and then scripting. It's quite an unusual process and we're playing it by ear—we could end up killing each other by the fifth issue. We're still at the polite stage, though."

According to Bendis, the first five-issue arc of the new series will—like the other Ultimate titles—focus on the formation and origin of the central cast.

"We'll introduce Ben [Grimm] and Reed [Richards], who grew up together, as well as Reed's introduction into a government think tank where he meets Sue and Johnny Storm as well as Victor Van Damme, who will eventually be nicknamed Dr. Doom," says the scribe. "We set up a lot of the characters and the way this series ties into the rest of the Ultimate Universe."

Of course, Ultimate U. fans will remember that the Ultimate FF first appeared in the Bendis-penned *Ultimate Marvel Team-Up* #9. While the appearance may set continuity nuts on edge, Millar plans to work that tale into the new series.

"[*Ultimate Fantastic Four*] ties into the rest of the Ultimate Universe 100 percent," says Millar. "The only thing that doesn't fit is the *Ultimate Team-Up* Fantastic Four story, but I actually came up with a way it'll fit in as well. It's utterly insane, but I'm going to try to convince everyone that it works. It'll just be explained in one panel."

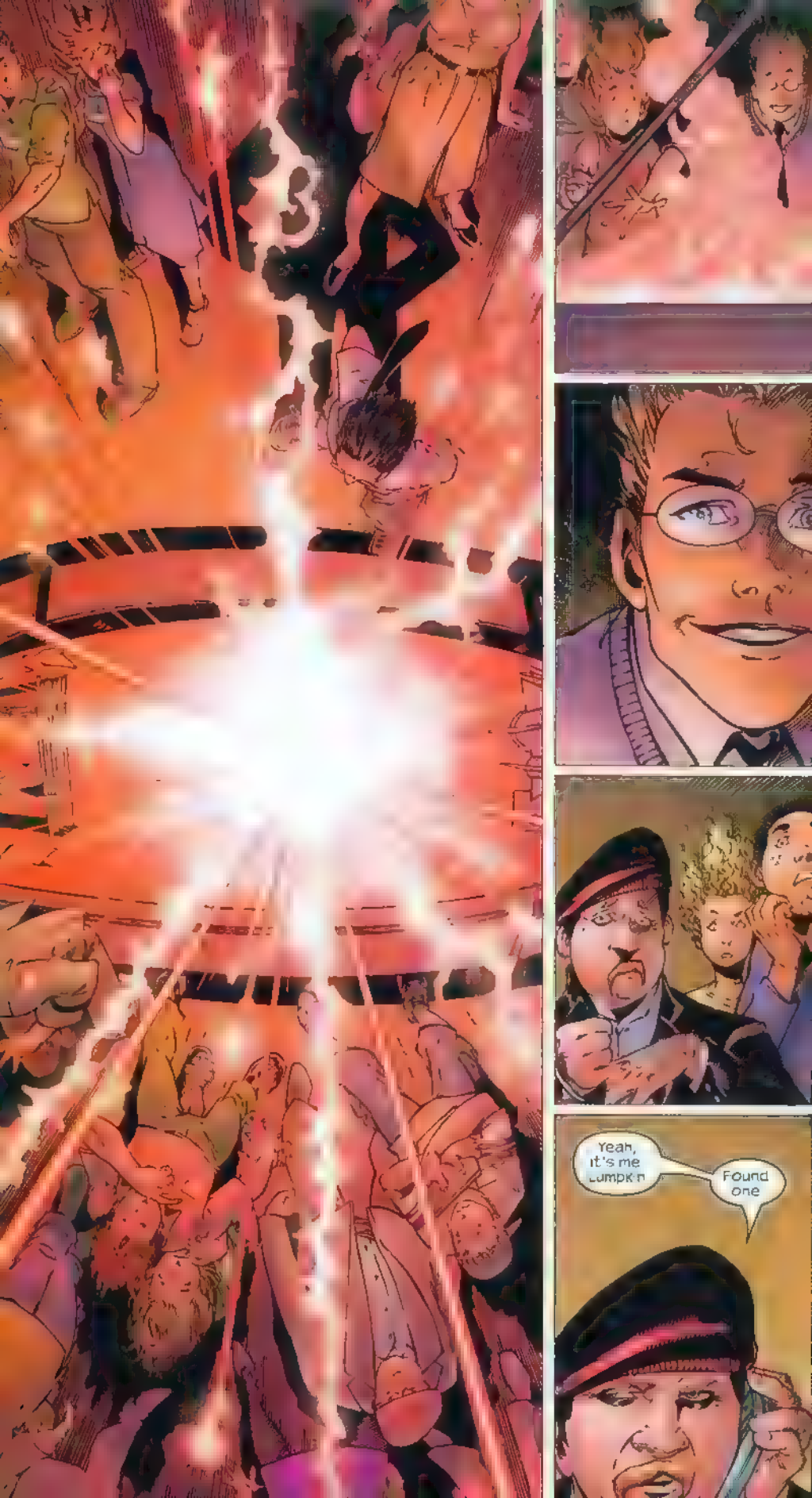
Psyched for *Ultimate Fantastic Four* #1, on sale Dec. 31? Then take your first look now, as a teenage Reed Richards is recruited by the government, makes his first trip to the Baxter Building and meets future teammates Sue and Johnny Storm!

A HITCH IN THE PLANS Covers for the first arc will be by *Ultimate FF* character designer Bryan Hitch.

MIDTOWN
MIDDLE SCHOOL
SCIENCE FAIR
Brian Michael Bendis & Mark Millar
STORY
Adam Kubert
PENCILS
Danny Miki
INKS
Paul Mounts
COLORS
Chris Eliopoulos
LETTERS
Reed Richards, what do you have for us?
GO TIGERS
Teleportation
The ability to move something or someone through space
. by the disembodiment of the object in one location and its reconstruction in another.
At least that is the theory.
Teleportation is possible, at least for sub atomic particles-
--using a celebrated and paradoxical feature of quantum mechanics known as the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen effect

Whether it can be done for larger systems, such as atoms, remains a mystery.
But my hypothesis here today is that instead of disembodiment...
...the real key to teleportation may be shifting the objects through a parallel dimension.
Shifting the objects through dimensions similar to our own, that are using the same space as our own
Once equations are properly calculated to breach this space ..
...one would imagine that this kind of teleportation could, in fact, change every part of our society.
starving people could have food distributed to them in an instant.
Our transportation systems would totally change.
The possibilities are endless.
But this is only phase seven of my project. I can only transport a small object one way
Hopefully, by next year, I, personally, will be able to go and get my--
Uh--

Well, uh...
Maybe I'll just show you what I am talking about
Um, okay. .
You, uh, you might want to step back


Yeah, it's me Lumpk'n
Found one

Richards' home
Queens, New York...
Reed's an exceptionally talented young man
As you can see, I work for the United States Government--
--for the Director of Main and Technology Development, actually
It's my job to go around the country and headhunt, if you will promising young talent
Young men and women, just like Reed
Public school is a waste of his time.
His brain works on another level
He is already working on applied sciences *decades* ahead of adults who actually *work* in the field of--
I knew it!! I knew we were raising him wrong!! I knew that I--
Ma'am
We didn't know what he was talking about half the time and I didn't- I didn't ..
Ma'am, you did nothing wrong.
Reed is a gifted, special, little boy. There isn't a textbook way to deal with something like this
What he needs *now* is a place to grow and express himself
Now the good news is that right here, right in the city, there's a *"think tank"*, of young men and women, just like Reed, where he'll be able to--
Ah, here it comes.
And how much is this *"tank"* thing going to cost us?
Actually, we'd be paying you.
Would we be able to visit?
How much are we talking about?
You say it's in the city?

"Just over the bridge
"Right in the heart of Manhattan.
This is it, Reed.
The Baxter Building
Welcome home

Doctor Storm ..

Reed, this-- this is Professor Storm. He'll be overseeing your personal projects

Young man.

Sir, it s-- it's-- I've read all of your-- it's just too--

Young man, if what I have read about your work is true, the honor is all mine.

Please, let me introduce you to *my* greatest achievements...

This is my daughter, Sue.

And the young man next to her is my son, Johnny.

Yo yo

Now, I want you to ease into this experience. Tomorrow morning we'll go over everything.

But there *is* something I want to show you.

We were all so impressed with your teleportation theories. Dimension actualization is a real pet project for us.

The fact that you found the interdimensional coordinates to the N-Zone all by your--

N-Zone?

(That's just *our* name for it.)

But what *we* weren't able to do--

Wait, you- you found it too?

We *found* it last year. But you-- you were the first to break through to it.

We hadn't gotten anywhere near that far. Our calculations were very-

I was the first?

You were

Uh.. How far *did* you get?

We can only look at it.

Look at it.. ?

Well, we are sure glad to meet you, kiddo.
We've been trying to put together some cartography on this region for months-- and when these little cars started appearing ..
...we thought we'd gone *nuts*.
Fantastic .
To be continued...

KIRSTEN DUNST

The leading lady from 'Spider-Man 2' discusses being jerked around by Doc Ock, re-teaming with Sam Raimi and her on-screen romance

WIZARD: "Spider-Man 2" is one of the most highly anticipated films of 2004. Does it live up to what people are expecting?

DUNST: Yeah, the story is better. The first movie was just the beginning. It was really exciting and you saw [Spider-Man] get his powers and use them for the first time. But with this movie, you're heavier into the drama. Because people have seen the first film, you can ride with things you'd have to explain in the first one. It's just cool and so many things connect in it. There are so many triangles—it's just exciting. The drama continues and it goes even deeper into the entire Spider-Man story. And our special effects have gotten so much better. Everything has evolved and it'll be even better than the first. Sam is so awesome. He makes the movies for his kids, too. It's pretty basic emotions of Spider-Man but it's also complicated relationships and things that everybody can relate to. I think that's why kids *and* adults enjoy it. It's real even though it's in this fantastical New York setting.

What was it like to team with director Sam Raimi and Tobey Maguire again?

It was great. It was like coming back to a family. You know everybody and my relationships with people had grown. It's very comfortable. I trust Sam and I feel very open on set. We had a lot of fun and it was a very easy, mellow shoot. It was family

Did you guys ever stress out about how excited people are about this film?

Honestly, I don't even think about it. All I think about is trying to make the story as best I can. I know that everyone's anticipating it, it's a big-budget movie and there's probably pressure to make as much money as the first, but none of that's my responsibility. All I can do is do my best in the film and try to make it as truthful and honest as possible. The hardest part of these movies is making everything come together. It can so easily fall apart because you get too caught up in action or you lose sight of the people. That's why the first one worked and that's why I think the second one will work—because Sam really holds that heart of the film together.

> **"Mary Jane's given up any hope of romance with Peter. They've fallen apart from each other."**
>
> **KIRSTEN DUNST**

You did a lot of stunt work in the first film. Was the sequel any more grueling?

So far it's been so much easier than the first movie. Oh my God, you have no idea. I'm so happy. I've only had to do two stunts basically where I'm being lowered. They were really high up but there was no dropping at least. I'm trying to think if I screamed.

You can tell me if you screamed...

Oh yeah, I did scream. I do have this one stunt where Doc Ock wraps his tentacle around my waist and picks me up and drags me outside in the air. That was a little complicated and a little scary but it looks great. But there's been nothing compared to the first film that was just endless months of blue screen.

What's Mary Jane's life like in the sequel?

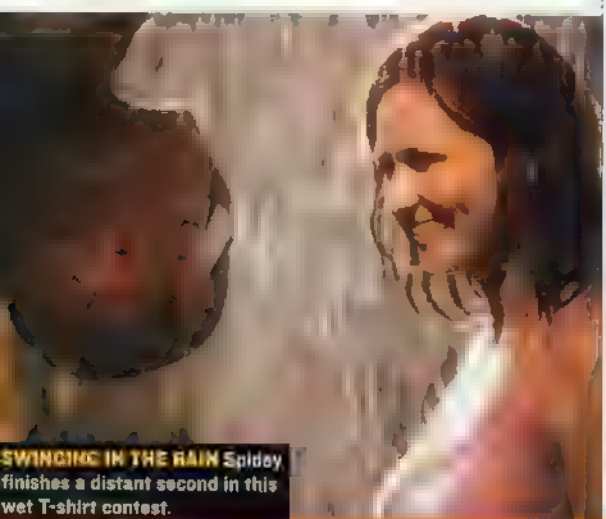
Well, Mary Jane is living in New York and she's working in a production of "The Importance of Being Earnest." She's not talking to her father anymore. She's grown up a lot since the first movie. She's on her own. She's about to start this new life with John Jameson—an astronaut—who's J. Jonah Jameson's son.

What's Peter and Mary Jane's relationship like in the sequel?

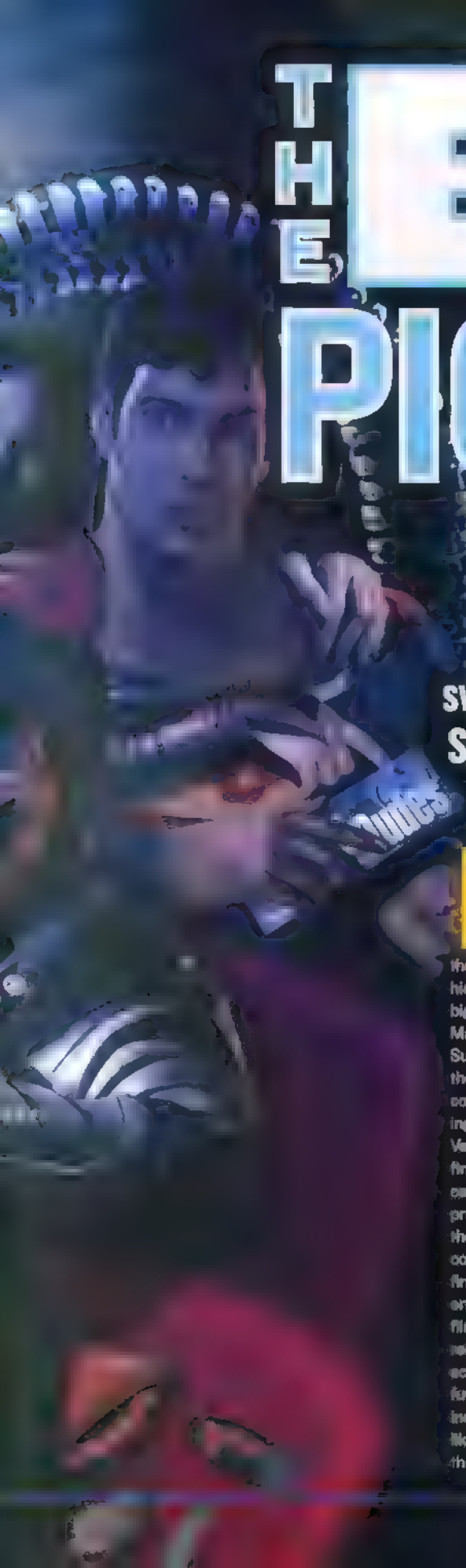
Peter and her don't really talk so much anymore. They're still friendly but he's kind of absent from her life since he's busy saving people, which is something she doesn't know. She's just kind of frustrated with him because he's not really there for her. She's kind of given up hope on any romance with him. They've kind of fallen apart from each other

John's a very serious, responsible man. I think Mary Jane picked him because she had such a lack of a father figure and she's drawn to people who are a little more authoritative and a little controlling maybe. You can tell they're not right for each other, but you can also tell why she might have gone for him. It's not out of the blue and she's not with a complete jerk. He's a really sweet guy, it's just not the charm and the love that she has between her and Peter.

■ **MIKE COTTON**



SWINGING IN THE RAIN Spidey finishes a distant second in this wet T-shirt contest.



THE BIG PICTURE

WIZARD gathers five of Hollywood's top comic-based moviemakers to debate what makes a good movie, swirling Internet rumors and the elusive Superman sequel. Popcorn not included.

By Mike Cotton • Original art intro by Greg Horn

PULLING TOGETHER a meeting of five of the most influential writers, producers and directors in Hollywood's red-hot comic book genre isn't that tough—getting them off their cell phones proves to be a different matter. • Inside Los Angeles' popular Chateau Marmont Hotel restaurant, Marvel Studios President Avi Arad—the man who helped resurrect the lifeless comic book film in Hollywood—bellows into his cell phone as he sets up meetings with potential new directors for Marvel's latest big budget project, "Fantastic Four." Across the room, "Smallville" creators and "Iron Man" screenwriting partners Alfred Gough and Miles Millar—the geniuses who brought Superman back to television, made Lex Luthor cool again and laid the groundwork for the second "Spider-Man" film with a draft of the script—lean into one of the eatery's corners and furiously make calls regarding the next day's "Smallville" writers meeting. Then there's "Blade: Trinity" writer and director David Goyer, planning a trip to Vancouver to begin shooting the final act of his "Blade" trilogy with Wesley Snipes after finishing the script for the upcoming "Batman" film—one of the most anticipated comic book revamps planned for 2004. Over at a corner table, "X2" and "Transformers" producer Tom DeSanto—the man who helped deliver Bryan Singer as the director of the "X-Men" film franchise and stayed onboard as Singer's link to comic fandom and continuity—sits quietly behind a menu and turns off his always-busy cell phone after finishing a few calls to his office. • The five men represent a quintet of the most powerful and influential idea architects working in the comic book movie genre today. A film developed by the team would be a guaranteed blockbuster—but no cameras are rolling today. Arad, Goyer, Millar, Gough and DeSanto aren't working on a single project together. They're sitting down to discuss something much more important—the future of the genre. From the box office success of the current crop of comic book-inspired films to harsh Internet criticism to why DC Comics doesn't have a film branch like Marvel Studios, no subject is taboo and everyone's more than happy to turn off their cell phones. At least for a little while.

"Lex Luthor can't destroy Superman, but Richard Pryor can."

–DeSANTO on how a franchise is destroyed

WIZARD: What's more important when making a comic book film: staying true to the source material, or appealing to a mass audience?

GOYER: It depends on the source material. If you're dealing with one of the incredibly well-known characters like Spider-Man, Superman, Batman or the Hulk, where they've already permeated the public consciousness, it's more important to stay true to the source material. When you're dealing with [a character] like Blade, where the public doesn't really know Blade very well, you have latitude.

ARAD: All source material for comics is based on science fiction assumptions. When you start developing a script, there's no reason not to stay with the source material as far as basic origins. The thing that gets the writers excited in the first place is obviously that material, and yet, you have to make it more contemporary. It's very dangerous for me, for instance, if they're trying to do exactly what was done 40 years ago.

GOUGH: It's interesting with "Smallville" because we didn't have a lot of source material. We're not really doing Superman in the suit, in Metropolis with the glasses. Someone told us when we first started that "you did the Marvel Comics version of Superman." And we had no idea what that meant. For us, it was trying to find out why Superman is good.

GOYER: You humanized him in that you gave him more foibles and problems, and that is the Marvel way. I do think that it's important for companies to say, "These are the core things that have to be in there and that you can't screw with." Even with "Blade," there were certain things that had to be there because if you change that, it's not Blade anymore.

DeSANTO: That's the thing we all run into. So many times, people aren't familiar with comics. They want to reinvent the wheel so much that it becomes square and you lose the essence of what made "Blade" work to begin with. You also have the luxury of looking at the comic book like it's a buffet line. So, "This works for us. This doesn't work," and it's been tested in the comic book. It's either succeeded or failed there.

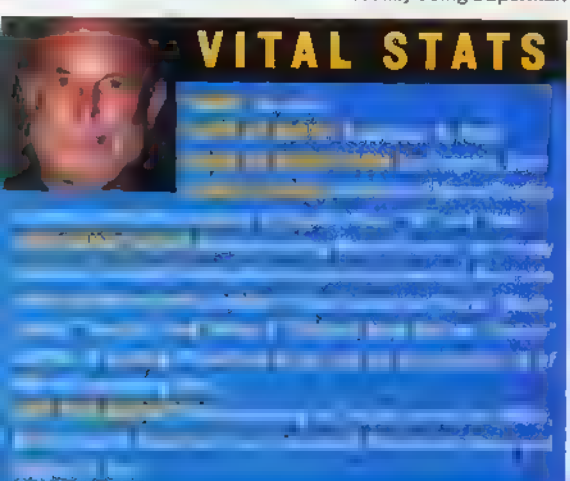
MILLAR: [With "Smallville"] it's the challenge of doing something that's been over-exposed in a way. It had loads of profit, four movies and was everywhere, but now you try something different.

WIZARD: With superhero movies being so hot and "Smallville" one of the highest-rated shows on The WB, why is it so hard to do a Superman movie?

GOUGH: Well, they have no one there to really guide that process. Really, the big joke is: We do "Smallville" [for DC], but end up writing movies for Marvel, which really bothers [DC President] Paul Levitz.

GOYER: But it's also that DC is beholden to Warner Bros.—that's a problem.

DeSANTO: With Marvel, you have a voice. Marvel Studios has a voice, someone who understands those characters, knows the characters and protects those characters. You don't have a situation like "Catwoman." You have a char-



acter that has been branded Selina Kyle. There are certain things that make that character work and why it's been loved by fans for over 60 years. If you expand that story and character for a larger audience, those same things are going to resonate, just on a larger scale. But if you reinvent it and it's not Selina Kyle anymore, you are going into uncharted territory, and you may pay the price for not having any association with the Batman mythology.

GOYER: I don't know where they're at now [with the Superman movie] But when I heard that in some of the drafts Lex Luthor was going to be from Krypton, it was just a screaming red light. "Do not do this." Part of the dynamic with Superman is that he's alone and he's the last one. He's lonely and disenfranchised. But beyond that, the beautiful dynamic between Superman and Lex Luthor is that Superman is the brawn and a guy who's sheer brains is his nemesis. That's also one of the reasons why there's not a Superman movie going on right now.

WIZARD: How do you feel about Internet movie rumors? It seems like the first thing you hear is always negative, whether it's the X-Men costumes or comic book continuity. Does that affect the way you produce, write or direct a film?

GOYER: I've heard so many rumors about things that I've purportedly done with the "Batman" script and haven't done with it and who's in it. I've had people posting my script, but it's a script by some schmoe.

GOUGH: I surf [the Internet] because I just sort of think it's interesting. It's after the episodes that I usually surf the chat rooms to see the general reaction.

ARAD: I'm just as interested in the reaction. The guys who take their time to go on the Internet happen to be the crowd that comes in, the passionate fans who represent the questions: not everyone was happy with the [Green] Goblin [in "Spider-Man"]. They thought that it was a little Power Rangers, but at the end of the day, it was Willem Dafoe as Harry's father that made it great.

GOYER: When the recent "Superman" script got out, it definitely had an impact on what they were developing because people were so outraged that it made the studio pause. Studio executives can read [Internet postings], and sometimes they'll read just one out of 100 and utterly panic. You have to be able

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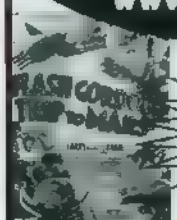

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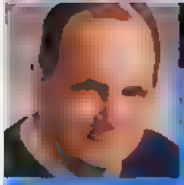


VITAL STATS

NAME: Alfred Gough

DATE OF BIRTH: Unknown, sometime in the '70s

BASE OF OPERATION: Los Angeles, Calif.

"Spider-Man 2," both with writing partner Miles Millar

third season of the WB's "Smallville"

to know how to read the information. It's just like the stock market. You have to know how to interpret what you're seeing.

GOUGH: But you always admire the passion of it. The fact that someone is getting online and is actually sitting there and typing out those pages. They're just going, "This is what I think that they should do better." You have to sort of admire that.

ARAD: As long as they're honest with their opinion. What I don't like about the Internet is when you show something, spoilers.

Right, the spoilers. Where someone got [an image] of a test shot.

ARAD: And all of a sudden, it creates a negative buzz. We all know what it takes to make a movie; there's nothing more physically and emotionally draining. Before you are ready to show what you really meant to do, someone is killing the product. That's uncool. We're all entitled to our opinion. It's when they steal material that's not ready to be shown. It just does a terrible disservice to the creative process, the writers, directors and cinematographers.

GOYER: It's even more insidious than that. I remember when Stephen Norrington [director of "Blade"] and I were developing "Ghost Rider" [last year] and some schmuck released a bunch of pictures and some little video that he'd done.

And then rumor becomes reality. On the first "X-Men," we were really the first movie to be under the microscope and someone stole a Polaroid of a stunt costume. It was a harness costume and it was hokey because you could see a harness underneath [the costume]. That was the first image, before we released anything on the movie and we just got royally reamed and the buzz went 100 percent negative. But to deflect that, I went down to San Diego [Comic-Con International] in August and just sat there. I spoke to the fans and said, "This is what's going on." I think that's the whole thing. They feel like they want to be heard and that's something that they love and that they hold precious. You're not going to come in and make the Red Skull Italian or bring in Richard Pryor to buddy up with Superman. Lex Luthor can't destroy Superman, but Richard Pryor can.

GOUGH: It's when they don't check their facts.

WIZARD: What's tougher, doing a weekly television series or a feature film?

GOUGH: Weekly TV series, hands down.

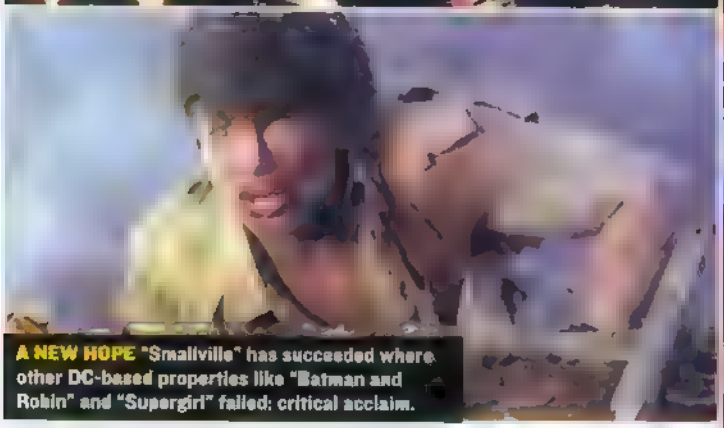
ARAD: No question.

GOYER: I've done them both and definitely, TV series.

GOUGH: The great thing about a movie is that you get to tell all the great scenes in two hours. Television is one big second act—a pain in the ass.

ARAD: A big pain in the ass.

GOYER: What do you do on average? Twenty episodes? Imagine quality control on that when you're expected to churn them out so fast.



A NEW HOPE "Smallville" has succeeded where other DC-based properties like "Batman and Robin" and "Supergirl" failed: critical acclaim.

GOUGH: And you have a set budget. The train started last week [for "Smallville"], and it won't end until the middle of April.

GOYER: [To Millar and Gough] With "Smallville," you narrowed it all down and told this tiny part of the story. I think that in the future, the comic book properties that will be successful TV shows are some of the smaller properties or some of the things where the story is very narrowed down. If it's Batman, you do Bruce Wayne.

ARAD: We are sinking a lot of time in television to develop this business, and it's a pain in the ass. It's a very different thing.

WIZARD: What re the best and worst comic book movies of all time?

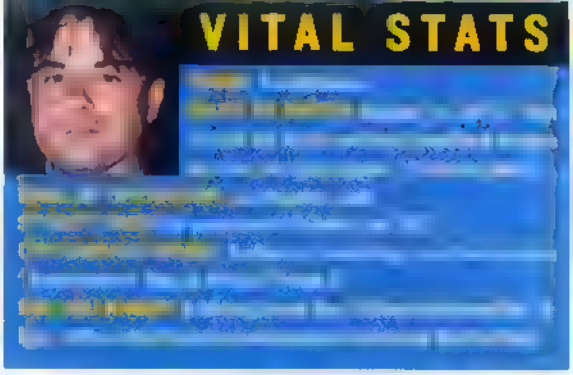
GOYER: I think that the worst comic book movie of all time was "Steel."

GOUGH: I actually really loved the first "Superman" movie because it set the bar for where everything else has sort of jumped off from, in terms of dealing with the humanity of that character and understanding that character. And I love the first "X-Men" movie

GOYER: I actually think that the first "X-Men" movie, in terms of approach was amazing, but I like "X2" better. I thought that it was better from start to finish. You didn't have the burden of setting everything up

DeSANTO: I think the reason that I'm in this business is because when I was 9 years old, my mom loaded up me and my two brothers to go see "Superman." I'd seen "Star Wars," but "Superman" was that movie for me

GOUGH: As a kid, I always really liked the second "Superman" because it had General Zod and Terrence Stamp [who played Zod] did the voice of Jor-El for us [on "Smallville"]



DeSANTO: I enjoy "Superman II" more, but I think that "Superman" had more of an impact on today.

GOYER: Well, it certainly was the first movie where they took a comic book and said, "Here is a mass market thing," boom, "There it is!"

ARAD: I actually thought that "Spider-Man" was the first time that comic book panels were brought to life, literally. If you define a comic book movie, this is the closest adaptation to a character that's ever been done. I think that Tobey [Maguire] is Peter Parker, a match made in heaven. You cannot physically get closer. Aunt May was Aunt May. Uncle Ben was Uncle Ben.

WIZARD: What upcoming comic film or television series are you each most excited about?

DeSANTO: Based on a comic book? Well, I think "Blade: Trinity," "Spider-Man II" and the new season of "Smallville."

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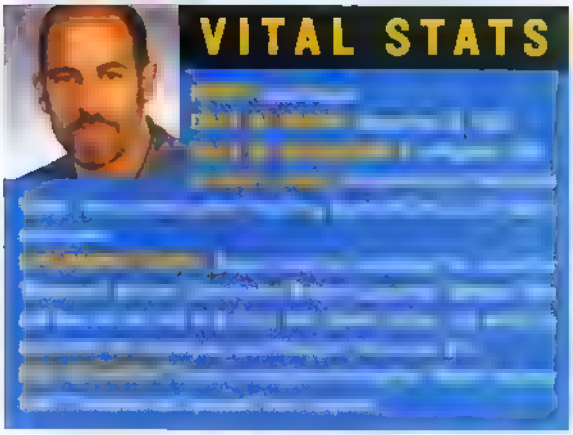


GOYER: This is going to sound self-serving for me, but I had a really interesting experience on "Batman" because I felt a little schizophrenic when I was doing it. I have never been happy with any of the "Batman" movies. They got some things right, but I was always disappointed, and I don't think that there's been anything even close to a definitive "Batman" film. What was interesting for me, working on ["Batman"], is that on one hand, I was in the trenches working and on the other hand, I was this kid going, "Oh my God, I can't believe that they're letting us do this because it's everything that I ever wanted to see in a big, sweeping, epic superhero movie." So, for me, "Batman " I was always attracted to Batman. So, it's pure fanboy.

ARAD: The one that I'm excited about is not ready to go yet. Eventually, when we get to write it, it's "Captain America."

WIZARD Are comic book films here to stay or are we just one flop away from the entire genre being put on the back burner by Hollywood?

GOYER: I think that there have been enough successful comic book movies out there now that it's become a new genre in the same way that you have a western or a romantic [comedy] or a sexual thriller. I think that in a broad spectrum, they will become cyclical and they will kind of wax and wane, but I think that it's a genre that's here to stay.

ARAD: I don't worry about it because of a very simple thing—economics. If you have a bad movie, a genre movie you're going to sell a s--tload of DVDs anyway. The community will be interested in revisiting the movie anyhow, and many times, when they see the DVD, their mind changes. They look at it as, "Wow, it's better than I thought once I gave it a chance." So, economically, for the studios, business has changed. It's about the opening weekend. If you don't have a good opening weekend, there's nowhere to go nothing catches on. It's as simple as that.

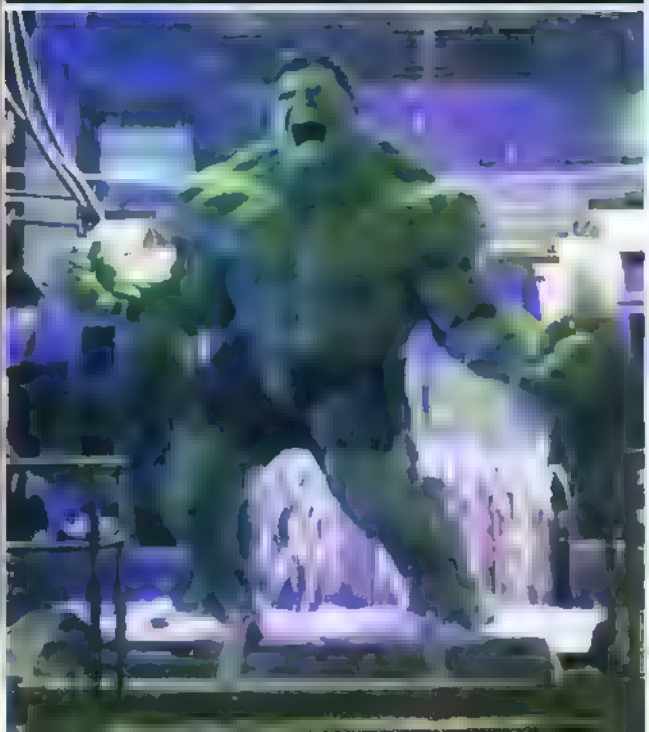
GOYER: Every obscure property is getting picked up by people who—in many cases—have no idea what they're developing. They just want to get in on that superhero bandwagon. After "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen," which under-performed, [people at Fox] were like, "I don't know, we definitely want to make 'X-Men III,' but do you think the superhero thing is over?" It's like, "No, it's not over. You just made a bad movie."

ARAD: The cautionary note for studios is to evaluate the properties. Make sure you have the right writer, the right director, make sure that the subject at least has the beginning of a name value.

DeSANTO Look, no one wants to be first in Hollywood, but everyone wants to be second. I remember when we were developing "X-Men," a lot of the attitude was, "Well, we just lost a lot of money on 'Power Rangers: The Movie.' Why would we do another superhero movie?" and you just want to pull your hair out. When "Batman and Robin" came out and tanked, that was it. The superhero movie was dead, but you know what? You make a good movie, you will sell tickets.

Staff Writer Mike Cotton wore his very own harness costume while conducting this interview

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS While not every comic book film can reach "X2" numbers, movies like "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen" and "The Hulk" have made the genre a constant presence at the box office.



MAKING BALE

Christian Bale to play Batman; filming begins in early '04 for a proposed '05 release date

FOR WHOM THE BALE TOLLS Christian Bale will get a haircut (hopefully) and don the Bat-tights in 2004.

Lately, everyone has something to say about the new Batman movie—everyone except the people involved in making it.

Outside of Warner Bros.' recent announcement that Christian Bale ("American Psycho") has officially signed on to play the Dark Knight in the new film, the umbrella of secrecy surrounding the latest Bat-flick has kept almost all details under lock and key.

For over a year, rumors have buzzed around Hollywood regarding the return of one of the hottest comic book franchises to ever touch the silver screen, but from Warner Bros. execs to director Christopher Nolan ("Memento") to screenwriter David Goyer ("Blade"), everyone has one comment—a firm "no comment."

In fact, only five things are concrete: Bale will play Bruce Wayne/Batman, the film is scheduled to begin shooting in early 2004, Nolan will direct, Goyer's script is finished and no one outside of the writer/director and studio bosses knows jack about the film.

Dealing with an air of secrecy that rivals the "Star Wars" sequels, Goyer could do little more than confirm Bale's casting and rave about the choice. "Bale is an excellent choice," said Goyer from the set of "Blade: Trinity," which he's currently directing. "I think the fans should be doing cartwheels. Face it, the guy was born to play Bruce/Batman."

Nolan agrees. "What I see in Christian is the ultimate embodiment of Bruce Wayne," the director stated in a recent press release. "He has exactly the balance of darkness and light that we were looking for."

After a trio of successful films, the Batman film franchise died out after 1997's "Batman and Robin." While director Tim Burton's 1989 classic "Batman" was a dark, cold look at the Caped Crusader that went on to gross over $250 million, the final Batman film of the '90s—director Joel Schumacher's abysmal return to camp comedy and over-the-top villains—was a disaster, barely breaking the $100 million mark in the U.S.

However, comic fans (and everyone in Hollywood, for that

matter) have been anticipating the return of the Dark Knight for years. With a bigger budget, solid cast and tight storyline, insiders say the Nolan/Goyer venture could become the definitive "Batman" film. With Internet rumors swirling about everything from the film's title to script details, Goyer admitted almost all questions regarding the film were off limits. Questions such as, "Is the film really titled 'Batman: Intimidation Game'?" got a stiff, "Can't answer this question. Sorry." The rumor that longtime Batman rogue Ra's Al Ghul would be the film's main villain received a quick, "I definitely cannot answer this question!"

Then there were the questions about the tone of the new film. Would it be darker than even Burton's original film, possibly even more violent? ("Sorry, I can't speak about this subject!") Is the film closer to a Year One tale of Batman still training and evolving into his superhero persona? ("And I absolutely, positively can't answer this one.")

"This guy was born to play Batman."

SCREENWRITER GOYER ON BALE

While the production team may not be answering questions, rumors have rapidly circulated regarding the rest of the cast. Now that Bale has signed on as the Dark Knight (and with a rumored February 2004 start date being bandied about), casting for the rest of the film should proceed quickly. The most popular rumor suggests that Dennis Quaid ("Cold Creek Manor") is up for the role of Batman's Gotham City Police Department ally Commissioner James Gordon.

"Now that we've found the best person to play Batman, we are really looking forward to moving ahead with the rest of our casting, and are excited about the exceptional group we are assembling," said Jeff Robinov, President of Production for Warner Bros. Pictures, leading some to believe other casting may have already been offered to A-list talent.

Of course, while Marvel Studios' productions of "Spider-Man," "X-Men" and "Blade" have lined Hollywood's pockets over the last five years, DC Comics seems prepared to spark some competition, even though the other two rumored Bat-films—the team-up film "Superman vs. Batman" and "Requiem for a Dream" director Darren Aronofsky's "Batman: Year One"—look to be permanently stalled at this point. Aside from "Batman," "Catwoman" is currently in production with star Halle Berry ("X-Men") while "Constantine," the *Hellblazer* adaptation starring Keanu Reeves, has kicked off production as well. "Wonder Woman" was placed on the fast track at the studio, with Joel Silver ("The Matrix") producing and former "Birds of Prey" co-executive producer Laeta Kalogridis currently tweaking the script.

Now that we've got our Batman, how about that "Superman" movie?

■ **MIKE COTTON WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY RICHARD HO**

More Batman...

MYSTERY OF BATWOMAN Don't forget to pick up this animated Batman DVD, now on sale.

HUSH VOL. 2 The second half of the classic *Batman* storyline is collected in a hardcover in Nov.

CHRISTIAN VALUES

Warner Bros. didn't peg Christian Bale as the perfect Bruce Wayne on looks alone. The Aussie actor's proven time and again that he's got the acting chops it takes to bring the brooding detective to cinematic life. Don't believe us? Head to the video store to check out his résumé for yourself!

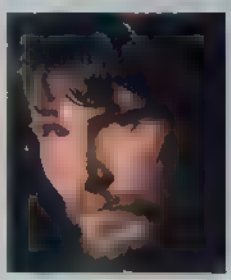
"Empire of the Sun" (1987) Young Bale plays James Graham, an English boy who finds himself in a Japanese prison camp during World War II. Separated from his parents? Hmmm. Forced to find his own way in a tough world? You don't say.

THE DASHING PLAYBOY

"Little Women" (1994) Bale is smooth enough to attract the romantic attentions of not only Jo, but her sister Amy! Reminds us of that womanizing billionaire Bruce Wayne, minus the cash or the kickin' wheels. Play on, playa.

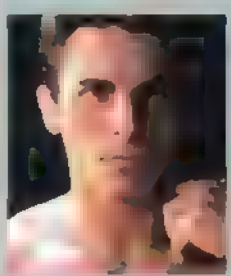
THE SPLIT PERSONALITY

"American Psycho" (2000) This time around, Bale *does* have money—and is obsessed with getting more. Even better, the money-grubbing, Huey Lewis-loving Wall Street yuppie Patrick has an alter ego. Just like the Dark Knight! 'Course, a psychotic killer Bats ain't—but hey, the intensity's right!



THE CHIZZLED ADVENTURER

"Reign of Fire" (2002) As the gloomy Quinn, Bale protects a community of innocent victims from powerful monsters that lurk in the night. Sure, the monsters in Gotham aren't exactly fire-breathing dragons, but you get the idea. And Bale's portrayal of the brooding warrior-type? Spot on.



THE VIOLENT HERO

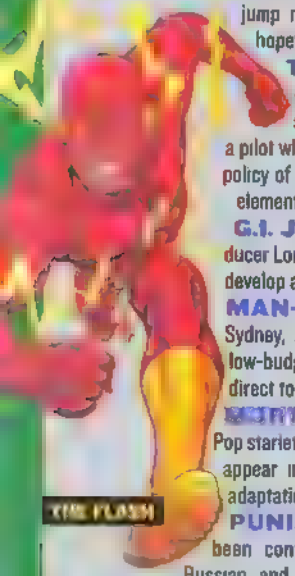
"Equilibrium" (2002) John Preston, once a deadly enforcer for a society that bans all emotions, turns on this system and dedicates his life to fighting a solo war against oppression. Suppressed emotions? A fugitive playing outside the rules? A kickass physique? Perfect.

■ **RH**

TRAILERS...

CONSTANTINE Recent additions to the cast include Rachel Weisz ("The Mummy") as a police officer, Bush lead singer Gavin Rossdale as the evil Balthazar, Djimon Hounsou ("Amistad") as demon fighter Papa Midnite and Shia LeBouf ("Holes") as Constantine's sidekick

ELEKTRA The script for the upcoming "Elektra" film starring Jennifer Garner has been turned in to Fox Studios, according to Marvel Studios Vice President Kevin Feige. "When Jennifer is done with this season of 'Alias,' we want to jump right into 'Elektra,'" says Feige. "We'd hopefully be shooting by April or May 2004."


THE FLASH

THE FLASH The Fastest Man Alive could be headed for the WB's fall 2004 schedule; the network has committed to a pilot which is rumored to follow the "no tights" policy of "Smallville," with a possible time travel element incorporated as well.

G.I. JOE Hasbro has joined forces with producer Lorenzo di Bonaventure ("Scooby Doo") to develop a live-action Joe flick.

MAN-THING Currently shooting in Sydney, Australia with an all-Aussie cast, the low-budget horror flick could wind up going direct to video.

MARY THE DEAD TEENAGER

Pop starlet Jessica Simpson (below) is rumored to appear in this obscure Marvel property's film adaptation, slated for release in summer 2004.

PUNISHER WWE wrestler Kevin Nash has been confirmed to appear as the villainous Russian, and Roy Scheider ("Jaws") will play Frank Castle's father. The film's release date has bumped up to April 16, 2004. According to Feige, "Thomas Jane has become Frank Castle through and through. He's bringing the Punisher to life in a star-making role the same way Tobey [Maguire] did in 'Spider-Man' and the way Hugh [Jackman] did in 'X-Men.'"

SPIDER-MAN ANIMATED *Ultimate Spidey* writer Brian Michael Bendis will record a commentary track to the first season of MTV's "Spider-Man Animated" Season One DVD set for release Jan. 4, 2004. Spidey co-creator Stan Lee plans to record a commentary track for one episode. ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

TRAILER OF THE MONTH

BLADE: TRINITY

SNIPES AS BLADE

Is Blade ready to play The Game? Joining Wesley Snipes and Kris Kristofferson in the cast are Jessica Biel ("7th Heaven") as Whistler's daughter, Dominic Purcell (Mission: Impossible 2") as Blade's vampire nemesis, Parker Posey ("A Mighty Wind") as a scheming vamp and WWE star Triple H as one of the vampire heavies! New Line is reportedly targeting an Aug. 13, 2004 release date.

SEXY BEAST

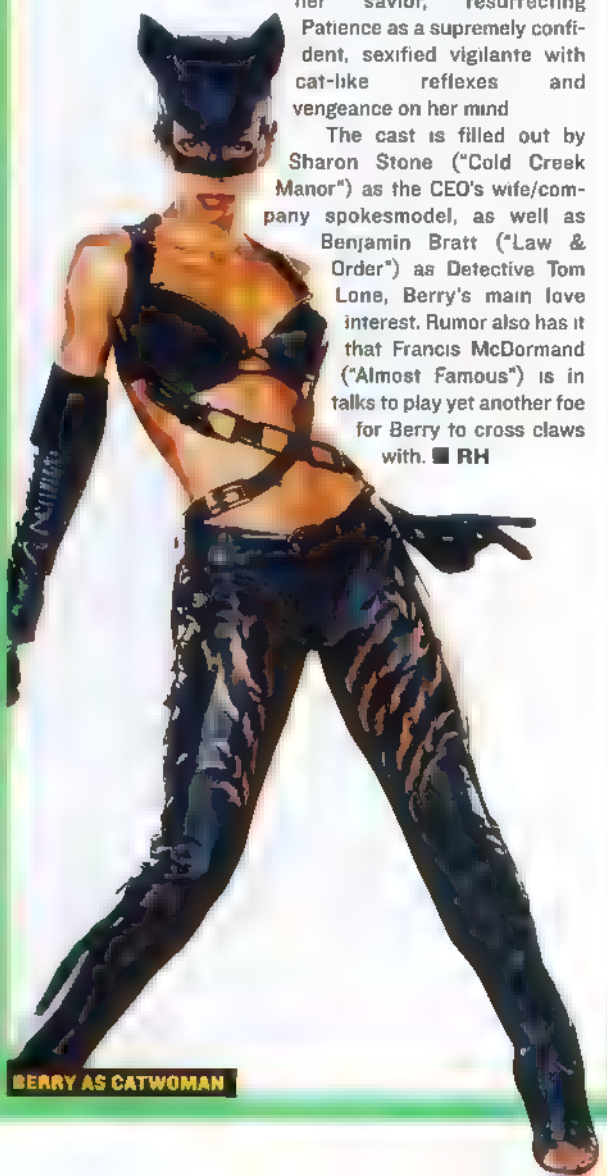
The first look at Halle Berry as Catwoman

Cat got your tongue?

You ain't the only one, fanboy. The first image of Halle Berry ("X2") in full Catwoman gear released by Warner Bros. had jaws dropping all over comicdom. A sexier take on the costume donned by Michelle Pfeiffer in "Batman Returns," this version sports the same sleek leather—just a lot less of it, judging by the tantalizing mix of feminine and feline below.

Filming kicked off in downtown Vancouver on Sept. 28 under the direction of French helmer Pitof. And while the studio remains catty on story details, we *do* know that the title character's alter ego is Patience Price, a mousy accountant for a cosmetics company who's murdered after stumbling across a terrible secret involving the company's CEO, played by Lambert Wilson ("Matrix Revolutions"). Enter an ancient myth involving an Egyptian Mau cat that Patience saved in the past, the kitty returns the favor by breathing life back into her savior, resurrecting Patience as a supremely confident, sexified vigilante with cat-like reflexes and vengeance on her mind.

The cast is filled out by Sharon Stone ("Cold Creek Manor") as the CEO's wife/company spokesmodel, as well as Benjamin Bratt ("Law & Order") as Detective Tom Lone, Berry's main love interest. Rumor also has it that Francis McDormand ("Almost Famous") is in talks to play yet another foe for Berry to cross claws with. ■ RH


BERRY AS CATWOMAN

GEEK LOVE

'The OC'—comics' coolest TV show?

"The OC" may be the last place you'd think to look for comic book geeks, but they're there—both on and off screen

Fox's edgy drama (which returns for a new season Oct. 29 after a successful eight-week summer stint) revolves around teenage street tough Ryan Atwood (Benjamin McKenzie), who moves into an affluent Orange County family's pool house and befriends the couple's awkward and comic book-craving son , Seth Cohen (Adam Brody) The unlikely pairing of comics and "Dawson's Creek"-esque teen angst comes almost entirely from "OC" writer Allan Heinberg, a longtime comic fan who's worked comic references into other top-rated shows he's written such as HBO's "Sex & the City" and Fox's "Party of Five."

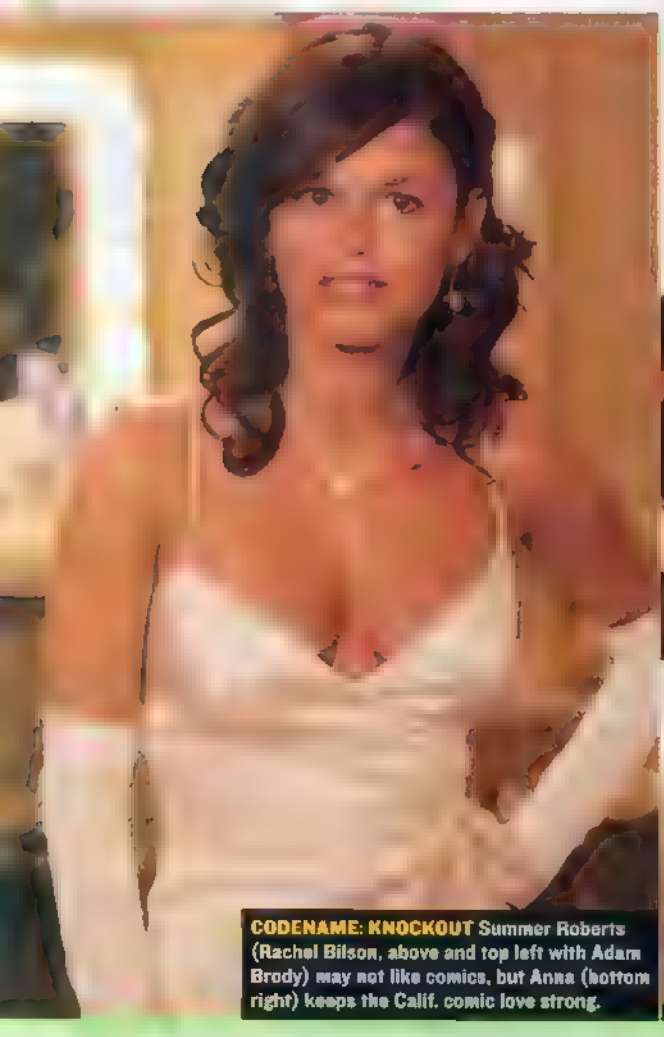
"I don't want to claim credit for making the Seth character a comic book fan," says the writer. "I am pretty evangelical in my love of comics and I exposed ["OC" creator] Josh [Schwartz] to a couple of books I really love. It sort of evolved naturally that comic books were something that Seth would be into. Josh very graciously let me influence Seth's taste in books—who his favorite writers are and who his favorite artists are and the books he's reading."

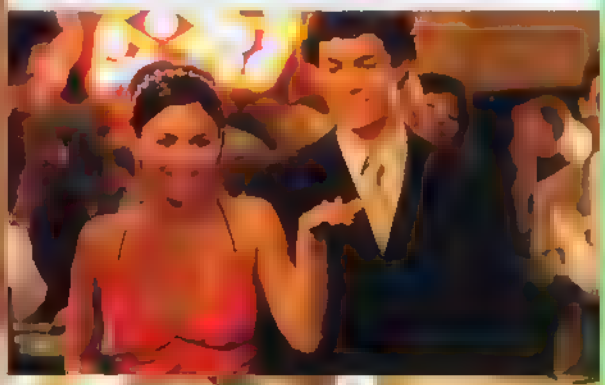
During the summer season, fans of the show witnessed McKenzie's young, Russell Crowe-like character and Brody's geek skater persona reading issues of DC's *JSA*, *Azrael* and *Legion*. According to Heinberg, the series (which is produced by DC Comics' parent company Warner Bros.) currently has approval to show only DC and Image titles, but the avid comic fan wants to introduce Marvel and independent comics such as Jeff Smith's *Bone* into the show.

"We haven't been able to clear Marvel stuff and right now I'm mostly reading Marvel titles," admits the Los Angles resident. "I'm reading all the [Brian Michael] Bendis stuff and the Ultimate books are all amazing. The books I'm excited about are the books I hope we can put on the show and people will go out and explore them." (An upcoming episode will feature an appearance by a teacher named "Mr. Bendis.")

Although she only made a brief appearance on the show, comic fan/babe Anna (Samaire Armstrong) will return during the fall season.

"I don't want to give away too much, but we do find out that Anna is a bit of a comic book artist and one of our characters might show up in a Wonder Woman costume," teases the Hollywood scribe. "For us, the geeks shall inherit the Earth. Behind the scenes, we all identify with Seth. We all identify with being beaten down and feeling trapped in our high school experience. The comic book world is a fun metaphor for us." ■ **MC**





CODENAME: KNOCKOUT Summer Roberts (Rachel Bilson, above and top left with Adam Brody) may not like comics, but Anna (bottom right) keeps the Calif. comic love strong.

FANCY DREW

Painter Drew Struzan unleashes a collection of his famed movie posters

He didn't write the book on movie poster excellence—he painted it. And now, Drew Struzan's getting a book all his own

In November, Dreamwave Productions releases *Drew Struzan: Oeuvre*, a 300-page, full-color hardcover that collects many of the finest paintings by the revered Master of the Movie Poster—from his famous "Star Wars" and "Indiana Jones" posters to comic book work like his cover to *Action Comics* #800.

For the pop culture painter, it's a distinction that he couldn't be more proud of. "It's a blessing to be recognized as having accomplished something good and beneficial within one's lifetime," says Struzan, who insists he isn't afraid of being pinned down to such a specific medium. "It's like Christopher Reeve—at one time, he felt that the association with him as Superman was a limitation on his career. But with time he came to appreciate that it was rather something to be proud of. He had done a wonderful job and was associated with a good thing. Maybe with the release of this book, people will become familiar with a fuller range of my work and see that I'm not just a one trick pony."

With so many classic Struzan images in one place, we had to ask: Does Struzan have any favorites? "I find that favorites limit my experience," says the artist. "If I hold up a favorite piece of my work, I may just begin repeating myself. There would be no other place to go and nothing further to accomplish.

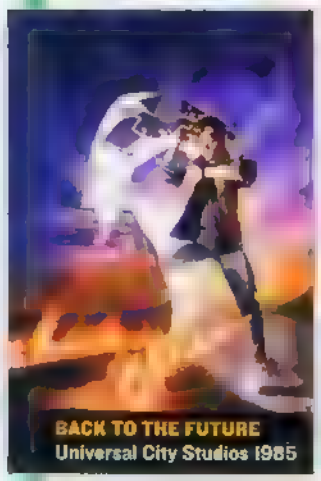
"But by all means, when you get your copy of the book, go through the 300 pages and pick *your* favorite!"

Here's a sample gallery of Struzan's finest to help get you started! ■ **RICHARD HO**

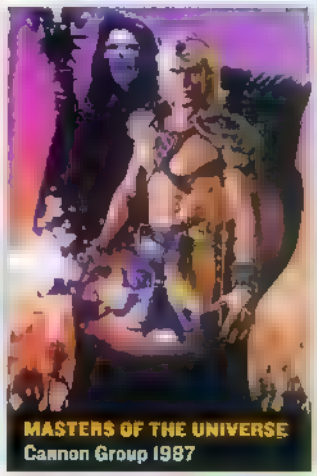
MALLRATS
Gramercy Pictures 1995

INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM
Paramount Pictures Corporation 1984

BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA 20th Century Fox Corporation 1986

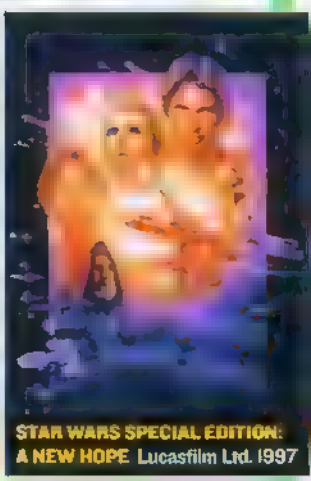


BACK TO THE FUTURE
Universal City Studios 1985



MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE
Cannon Group 1987

THE THING
Universal City Studios 1982



STAR WARS SPECIAL EDITION: A NEW HOPE Lucasfilm Ltd. 1997

DVD BUZZ...

LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER, THE CRADLE OF LIFE This Special Collector's Edition will separate the real "Cradle of Life" fans from the posers! Includes director's commentary, an alternate ending, action-packed featurettes and a "Gerard Butler Screen Test" (wha?). Angelina...so pouty...can't resist! (Nov. 18)

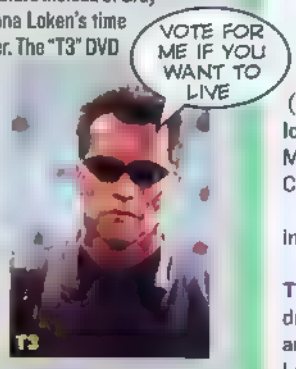
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS SPECIAL EXTENDED EDITION This is the one you've been waiting for, my precious! This epic four-disc set contains 40 minutes of extra footage, commentaries and film insights that should keep you busy for, oh, the next 400 years. (Nov 18)

KING OF THE HILL SEASON 2 The further adventures of the loveable Hank Hill and his unending effort to hawk propane continue in this DVD. Contains the complete 1997-98 season on four discs with commentary by the director and the animated stars themselves! As Boomhauer would say: "Dang ol' DVD man, I'll tell you what, like a dang ol' shiny videotape but like round and dang man ..." (Nov. 11)

SPACE GHOST: COAST TO COAST VOL. 1 Sixteen classic episodes from season one with your ray-happy host, Tad Ghostal. With commentary and celebrity guests galore, you'll be screaming "Banjo!" before the night is over. (Nov. 18)

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: FOUR-VOLUME SET The brand-spankin' new TMNT episodes are better than the originals! In case you've missed them, this box Turtle set collects the first four episodes. Get it? Box turtles? Zing! (Nov. 18)

TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES See the govah-nator himself fight the future instead of Gray Davis. Or just chapter skip to Kristanna Loken's time portal sequence over and over. And over. The "T3" DVD contains commentary, a gag reel, deleted scenes and some of the best one-liners of last summer (Nov. 11)

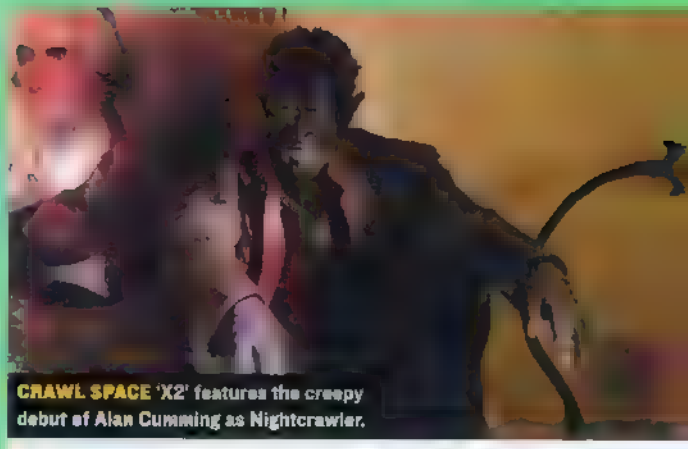


THE X-FILES: SEASON 8 The penultimate box set to one of the creepiest TV series of all time (not counting "I'm With Busey") collects all 21 episodes on six discs, and includes the introduction of Robert "perma-grimace" Patrick as Agent John Doggett! (Nov. 4)

DVD OF THE MONTH

AQUA TEEN HUNGER FORCE

Just when you thought cable television couldn't get more absurd, you get Meatwad, Master Shake and Frylock! From Cartoon Network's Adult Swim block, these super-sized fast food products star in a 16-episode DVD. Included are "Mayhem of the Mooninites" (with the funniest non-threatening alien invasion from 2-D Atari rejects ever witnessed), the original cut of the pilot, unseen footage and hidden bonuses. Boo-yah! That's why ATHF still rules the hood, G. (Nov. 18)



CRAWL SPACE 'X2' features the creepy debut of Alan Cumming as Nightcrawler.

X-PLODING ONTO DVD

Nightcrawler & Co. to put TV in tailspin

Now you can watch the top comic book movie of all time, as voted by, well...us, in your very own living room. When "X2: X-Men United" storms into stores on DVD Nov. 25, you'd swear 20th Century Fox was using a fully functional Cerebro helmet when you see the ton of features included in this two-disc collection—they've read our minds completely.

X2: X-MEN UNITED

Hugh Jackman, Halle Berry

Rated PG-13, Nov. 25

Picking up where the last film left off, "X2" forces the X-Men to find help from unlikely allies (Magneto and Mystique) in order to stop the looming threat of black ops commander William Stryker (Brian Cox) and the government's Mutant Registration Act

Meanwhile, Wolverine (Hugh Jackman) hunts down clues about his past, some sweet lovin' from Jean Grey (Famke Janssen) and, failing that, a good stogie.

A bevy of mutant alumni return, including Professor X (Patrick Stewart), Storm (Halle Berry), Rogue (Anna Paquin), Iceman (Shawn Ashmore) and Ian McKellen as the cunning Magneto. Also—he's new, he's blue, get used to it—Alan Cumming makes his show-stopping debut as Nightcrawler.

Here are just some of the X-tra special features included in this colossal DVD:

TALKING HEADS—Offering their two cents on the film are director Bryan Singer and cinematographer Tom Sigel, and yet another commentary track includes comments from producers Lauren Schuler Donner and Ralph Winter, and screenwriters Michael Dougherty, Dan Harris and David Hayter.

OF BLUE SKIN AND GREEN SCREENS—Disc two features "The Second Uncanny Issue of X-Men: The Ultimate Making-Of Documentary" and II—count 'em, II—featurettes (sorta like features, but cuter and bite-size). A few of these include: a wild "Wolverine/Deathstrike Fight Rehearsal" sequence, a Nightcrawler stunt rehearsal, "The Secret Origin of X-Men—A Complete Anthology" and "Requiem for Mutants—The Score of 'X2.'"

EVEN MORE MUTIE—Other bonuses include an interactive, multi-angle scene study of Nightcrawler's White House attack, II deleted/extended scenes and 26 "revealing" photo galleries Revealing what, you say? Calm down, fanboy—or Mystique will beat your ass in the john. ■ **CHRIS WARD**

© 2003 TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

GAME TIME *Final Fantasy X-2* sports explosive sorcery and more exotic monsters.

HOLIDAY HOTTIES

WIZARD whips up the ultimate holiday gaming guide

It's the season for gaming.

Oh yeah, and giving, too. Lucky for you, *Wizard* helps you take care of both with an assortment of gift suggestions for every gamer on your holiday shopping list. From mesmerizing RPGs to gritty first-person shooters to rock-and-sock-'em fighting extravaganzas, we break down the season's best into a variety of fun categories and spotlight one perfect choice for each—and toss in a few equally kickass games for good measure.

So get into the spirit, whip out that wallet and start spreading some holiday cheer!

FOR THE ADVENTURER:

Jak II (Sony) Kids *looooove* platformer games. Maybe it's the cartoony characters. Maybe it's the easy-to-master gameplay elements. Whatever it is, *Jak II* takes it and raises it to the next level. The sequel boasts all the rollicking moves of the original *Jak and Daxter*—with a much edgier story. After two years of imprisonment by the evil Baron Praxis, Jak escapes with the help of his wisecracking partner and uses new morphing powers to get revenge. The biggest surprise of all? The increased emphasis on shooting and the added ability to steal hovercrafts, *Grand Theft Auto*-style! **(PS2, available now)**

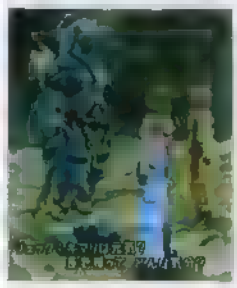
WORTH 'TOONIN' IN FOR:

• Mega Man X7 (Capcom) The beloved series finally debuts on PS2, with cel-shaded graphics and a blend of 3-D and traditional 2-D side-scrolling action. **(PS2, available now)**

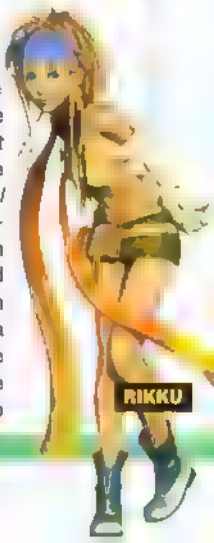
• Kya: Dark Lineage (Atari) Groundbreaking game dynamics, like free falling and sliding, are the name of the game for the blue-haired, boomerang-tossing star of *Kya* as she muscles her way through hordes of wolf-like creatures in a strange world. **(PS2, available now)**

FOR THE FANTASY LOVER:

Final Fantasy X-2 (Square Enix) Gamers are constantly accused of living in fantasy worlds—



but with worlds like these, who can blame them? The latest installment of the acclaimed *Final Fantasy* series re-immerses gamers in the ultra-detailed realm of Spira, with familiar faces Yuna and Rikku leading the way (in sexier outfits, no less!). With even more exotic monsters and breathtaking sorcery to



MORE COOL GAMING GIFTS

Sure, games make perfect gifts. But there's more to games than just pixels and consoles! Check out these awesome game-related items for even more gift ideas to light up any gamer's face.

DEAD OR ALIVE: XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL BIKINIS

Gaming geeks, fulfill one half of your most sordid fantasy with these babelicious bathing suits, pulled straight from the lovely ladies of the wildly popular Tecmo title (now all you need is a girl to give 'em to!) Four designs are available now at the Tecmo Website (http://tecmogames.com/store/bikinis.asp), including Lamina, Kepheus, Asterope and Amaterasu, with more to follow. Cost? A measly $149.99 each!

GAMEBOY ADVANCE SP

GAMEBOY ADVANCE SP ONYX AND FLAME

Silver and blue may not be your colors of choice—but if black and red are your favorite hues, then you're in luck! Nintendo's Gameboy Advance SP is now available in the hip-sounding shades of Onyx (translation: black) and Flame (translation: red). Same portable gaming goodness—just more fashion-conscious.

DREAMWAVE CAPCOM CALENDAR

Can't get enough Capcom? How about a year's worth of your favorite Capcom characters, courtesy of Dreamwave Productions? To coincide with its new line of Capcom comics, the publisher has released a 2004 Capcom Calendar that features the stars of *Darkstalkers*, *Devil May Cry*, *Mega Man*, *Rival Schools* and other popular Capcom properties, drawn by an assortment of Dreamwave artists.

CAPCOM CALENDAR

HALO FIGURES

HALO COLLECTIBLE FIGURES

The shoot-'em-up action doesn't stop when you turn off your Xbox—not when you've got these awesome Halo figures from JoyRide Studios at your fingertips! The Master Chief figure (with over 18 points of articulation) is available now, with the Warthog Light Reconnaissance Vehicle set to hit stores in November and the AI construct Cortana due next year. Expect to shell out between $14.99-17.99 for the goods. ■ RH

explore in the virtual world of *FF X-2*, gamers will never want to leave. **(PS2, December)**

MORE MYTH ADVENTURES:

• **Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King** (Electronic Arts) Act out the legendary conclusion to the "Lord of the Rings" film trilogy with eight playable characters and 12 levels of Middle-Earth action. **(PS2, November)**

• **Champions of Norrath** (Sony Online) Set in the world of *Everquest*, this RPG drops players into a head-spinning assortment of dungeons filled with ghouls, goblins and powerful spells. **(PS2, November)**

FOR THE SCREAM-SEEKER:

Castlevania: Lament of Innocence (Konami) The cold won't be the only thing giving you chills this winter, as horror-themed games like *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence* invade in swarms The first PS2 offering from the long-running franchise stars Leon as the first Belmont to battle the ghoulish minions of Dracula. Along with the creepy environments, terrifying enemies and a brand new arsenal of whip combos, the vampire killin' action has never been more frightening—or satisfying. **(PS2, November)**

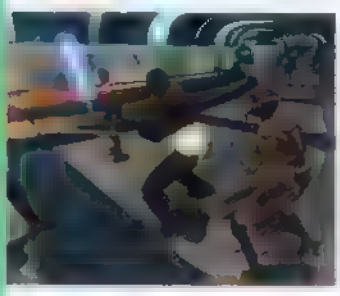
PLAN A FRIGHT NIGHT:

• **Otogi: Myth of Demons** (Sega) It's samurai swords versus demons and spirits in this haunting slaughterfest in Japan's mythical past. **(Xbox, available now)**

• **Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly** (Tecmo) The original survival/horror classic was hailed as the scariest game of all time, and the sequel aims to crank the horror meter even higher as twins Mio and Mayu make their way through a haunted village. **(PS2, winter)**

FOR THE SCI-FI GEEK:

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic (LucasArts) Aliens? Check. Spaceships? Check. Exotic weapons? Definitely check. *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* boasts everything we've come to expect from the sci-fi genre—and then some. Players take control of a fascinating cast of brand new Jedi, wielding amazing Force powers and badass light saber techniques in the never-ending battle to bring peace and order to the Republic. With multiple worlds and endless side quests to explore—not to mention the ability to choose between the light and dark side of the Force—*KOTOR* truly transports Star Wars fans to a galaxy far, far away. **(Xbox, available now)**



SCOUR THE GALAXY WITH:

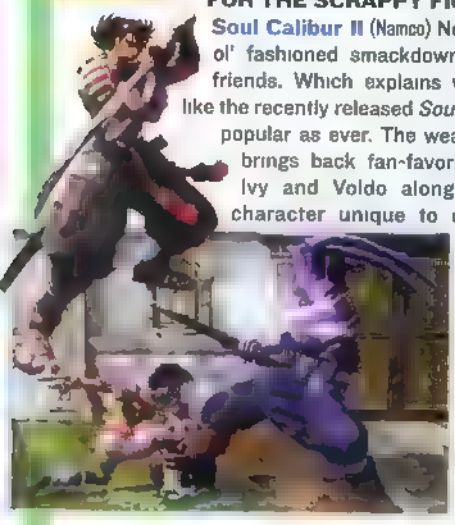
• **Planetside** (Sony Online) Team up with hundreds of other players online in this intense first-person shooter that spans 10 continents! **(PC, available now)**

• **Tron 2.0** (Buena Vista) The cult favorite sci-fi flick gets a

video game conversion, as players download into a cyber world complete with light cycle racing and arena disc combat. **(PC, available now)**

MITSURUGI

FOR THE SCRAPPY FIGHTER:

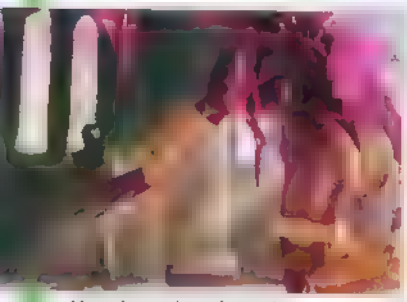


Soul Calibur II (Namco) Nothing beats a good, ol' fashioned smackdown with your closest friends. Which explains why fighting games like the recently released *Soul Calibur II* remain as popular as ever. The weapon-based slugfest brings back fan-favorite combatants like Ivy and Voldo along with one special character unique to each console, and expands on the groundbreaking weapons system. The result? A highly addictive game that'll have you and your buddies talking trash for hours. **(PS2, Xbox and GC, available now)**

TAKE 'EM OUT BACK FOR A BEATING:

• **Backyard Wrestling** (Eidos) Slam your opponents with flowerpots and flaming tables in this raucous brawler with highly destructible environments! **(PS2 and Xbox, available now)**

• **WWE Smackdown!: Here Comes The Pain** (THQ) The outlandish wrestlers of the WWE are back—and this time, there's even a bra-and-panties mode for the divas to get down and dirty! **(PS2, November)**



FOR THE HACK-N-SLASHER:

Ninja Gaiden (Tecmo) You shouldn't play with swords. That is, unless they're in a game like *Ninja Gaiden*. The long-awaited next-gen adaptation of the classic Nintendo franchise stars badass ninja Ryu Hayabusa in a brand new storyline, sending the stealthy warrior on a quest to reclaim his family's magical sword. With stunning graphics and an ultra-slick game engine that takes advantage of Ryu's extensive martial arts skills, *Ninja Gaiden* looks to do its predecessors proud. **(Xbox, November)**

HONE YOUR EDGE WITH:

• **Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance** (Acclaim) Relive the battle-filled existence of an ancient Roman gladiator in this bloody hackfest. **(PS2 and Xbox, available now)**

• **Seven Samurai 20XX** (Sammy) Inspired by the Akira Kurosawa film "Seven Samurai," this third-person action-adventure follows a skilled samurai who must defend a bleak and futuristic world. **(PS2, November)**

FOR ITCHY TRIGGER FINGERS:

SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs II (Sony) You, too, can be an army of one, courtesy of realistic shooters like *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs II*. The sequel to 2002's highly successful military release—which blazed the trail for online combat—*SOCOM II* features upgrades in both online and single-player modes, from more intelligent allies and enemies to an expanded arsenal of weapons. The producers also studied terrorist tactics and dangerous global trouble spots in an effort to make your defense of liberty as close to reality as possible. **(PS2, November)**

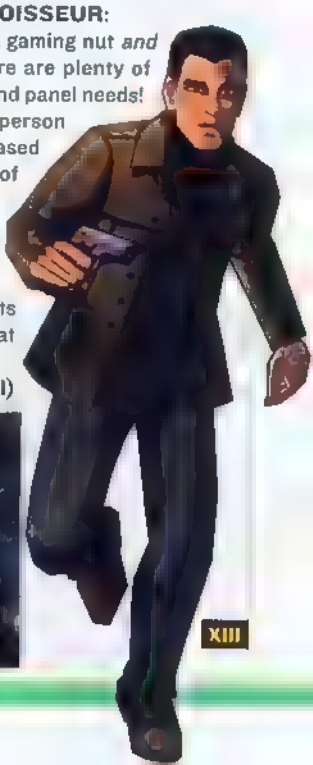
TARGET THESE TITLES:

• **Medal of Honor: Rising Sun** (Electronic Arts) The latest installment of the World War II-era shooter takes players from the attack on Pearl Harbor through the gritty jungles of the Pacific. **(PS2, Xbox and GC, November)**

• **True Crime: Streets of LA** (Activision) Following in the tire tracks of *GTA* and *The Getaway*, *True Crime* lets players explore 40 square miles of Los Angeles scenery in their quest to take down the city's powerful crime syndicates. **(PS2 and Xbox, available now)**

FOR THE COMIC BOOK CONNOISSEUR:

XIII (Ubi Soft) Let's face it—you're a gaming nut *and* a comic book nut. Thankfully, there are plenty of games that satisfy both your pixel and panel needs! Take *XIII*, the super-stylized first-person shooter with a comic book twist. Based on a popular French graphic novel of the same name, *XIII* is chock-full of comic book influences, from the cel-shaded graphics to pop-up panels that offer alternate views of the action. Even the lettered sound effects mimic the "Boom!" and "Twack!" that grace the pages of your favorite funnybooks! **(PS2, Xbox and GC, fall)**



BAG AND BOARD THESE TITLES:

• **Drake** (Majesco) "Batman: The Animated Series" meets "The Matrix" in this action-packed third-person shooter featuring Hong Kong-style martial arts and a kickass Freeze Motion fighting mode **(Xbox, November)**

• **Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu** (Ubi Soft) Looking for more traditional comic games? Check out Batman's latest action/adventure release, as the Dark Knight takes on the Jim Lee-designed Sin Tzu with the help of Robin and Batgirl **(PS2, Xbox and GC, available now)**

SUDEKI

FOR THE OTAKU:

Sudeki (Microsoft) Can't get enough anime and manga? Behold *Sudeki*, a fantasy RPG that takes full advantage of the Japanese flair for beautiful game design. A swordsman, sorceress, huntress and gunslinger band together to fight mechanical monstrosities in the magical world of Sudeki, using a real-time battle system reminiscent of *Phantasy Star Online*. And of course, the lush environments are plucked straight from the Land of the Rising Sun. **(Xbox, November)**

IMPORT THESE TO YOUR SYSTEM:

• **Disgaea** (Atlus) The latest in the Japanese subgenre of 2-D strategy RPGs, *Disgaea* features the trademark big-headed anime character designs and a horde of demonic cuties running around the Netherworld. **(PS2, available now)**

• **.hack//OUTBREAK** (Bandai) The third installment of the popular RPG within an RPG sends players back into the virtual reality known as the World. **(PS2, available now)**

FOR THE STARSTRUCK FANBOY:

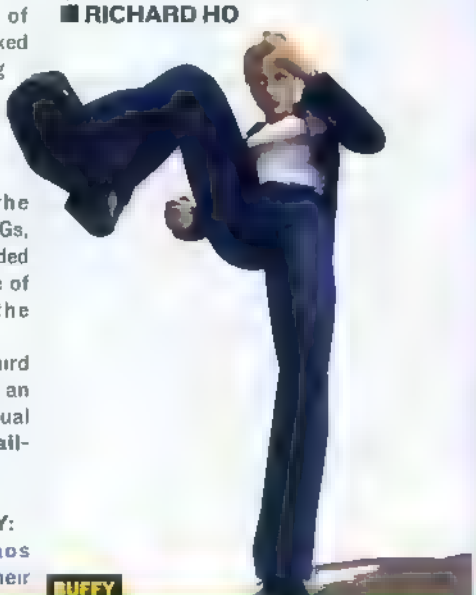
Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds (Vivend. Universal) You thrill to their exploits in TV shows and movies—now you can make them do your bidding in a video game! Ever wish you could step into Sarah Michelle Gellar's shoes? *Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Chaos Bleeds* lets you live out all your vampire-killing fantasies in a third-person action/adventure format! Players take control of their favorite Buffy cast members—from Willow to Spike—to take down Sunnydale's worst **(PS2, Xbox and GC, available now)**

GO STARGAZING WITH:

• **Alias** (Acclaim) Jennifer Garner's sexy spy Sydney Bristow comes alive in this stealth action game that emphasizes sneaky maneuvers along with fighting. **(PS2 and Xbox, available now)**

• **Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines** (Atari) Arnold Schwarzenegger lends his likeness to this FPS adaptation of the blockbuster movie. The gameplay switches to third person *Tekken*-style brawling when Ah-nuld takes on the T-X! **(PS2, Xbox and GC, November)**

■ **RICHARD HO**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RIDING THE DARK HORSE

Publisher continues manga push with two new titles

If you thought not being able to read Japanese would prevent you from checking out some quality manga, fear not, Dark Horse has you covered.

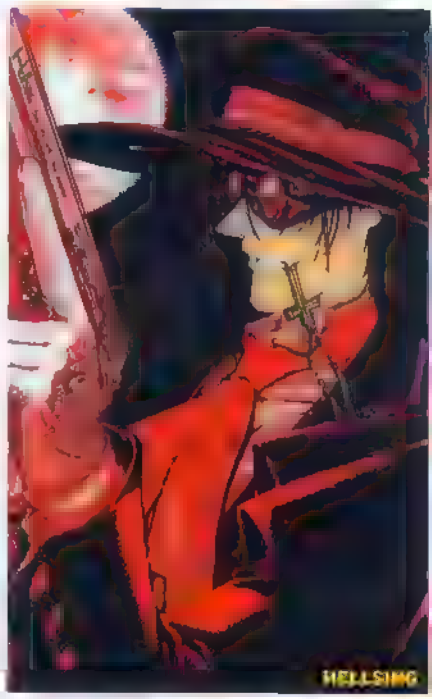
The publisher continues to expand its manga offerings with the horror manga *Hellsing* and the ultra-popular Internet comic book *MegaTokyo* leading the way.

The December-shipping *Hellsing*, from writer/artist Kouta Hirano, is the third series to make the trip across the Pacific as part of Dark Horse's partnership with Digital Manga, which also brought over the first English translations of the hugely successful series *Trigun* and *The Ring* in November.

Hellsing tells the tale of an age-old English secret organization put in place to protect Queen and country from hordes of bloodthirsty ghouls lurking in the shadows. Vampires prove to be an especially deadly plague upon the country's citizens, but unfortunately for those with a sanguine tooth, *Hellsing*'s star agent Alucard is an even deadlier threat to creatures of the night. A vampire himself (just spell his name backwards!), the formidable Alucard sends silver bullets ripping through monster flesh without getting a bead of sweat on his blood-red coat.

"[*Hellsing*] is about ghouls and vampires, and there's lots of blood and guts," explained Tim Ervin-Gore, Dark Horse's manga editor. "But it's more of a goth/pop, blood and action book. It's like going to a rave with all of your zombie friends and having a bath of blood fall from the rickety rafters when the clock strikes 4 a.m."

This isn't Dark Horse's first success in the world of manga. The company also produces the cyberpunk epic *Akira*, legendary samurai tale *Lone Wolf and Cub* and the action-packed *Blade of the Immortal* series



"Manga has always been a steady seller," noted Ervin-Gore. "Recently manga sales have fueled this new branch in the industry, opening bookstores to a wider comics market, and it's becoming more lucrative."

While Japan may be the obvious choice for source material, Dark Horse leaves no stone—or website—unturned when looking for potential new titles, hence their upcoming release of the ultra-popular web comic *MegaTokyo*.

"*MegaTokyo* not only engages a large segment of the manga—and anime—obsessed audience," said Ervin-Gore. "It also joins forces with friends of this electronic-era audience by also scooping up gamers and chat room communities."

The second volume of the series from Fred Gallagher and Rodney Caston ships in January and continues the tale of Americans Piro and Largo, who travel to Tokyo but find they are unable to cough up enough dough to get back home. While stuck in Japan, they become entangled in a plethora of adventures that range from battling zombies to romancing the locals.

From gun-toting, ghoul-hunting vampire killers to video game geeks stuck in the Orient, Dark Horse keeps the manga coming. ■ **TODD CASEY**

STRANDED Piro and Largo, the stars of Dark Horse's *MegaTokyo*, find themselves stuck in Japan with empty pockets.

ANIME BUZZBOX

MY BEAUTIFUL GIRL, MARI ADV Films announced the acquisition of the acclaimed Korean animated feature "My Beautiful Girl, Mari" for North American distribution. Directed by Lee-Sung Kang, and largely animated using digital techniques, the anime is widely considered to be the finest original work to emerge from Korea. ADV Films plans a limited theatrical release in 2004 followed by an Anime Network broadcast debut and home video release.

DOGGY POO

DOGGY POO Sh--happens, but rarely like this. Set for release in 2004, Central Park Media's latest anime isn't just a funny play on words. "Doggy Poo," based on the best-selling children's book by Jung-Saeng Kwon, actually tells the harrowing tale of a heroic piece of doggy dung. The ostracized pile of excrement finds itself lonely and down in the dumps until it discovers its self worth by sacrificing itself to help a flower bloom. The film premiered in August at the Big Apple Anime Fest where Central Park Media immediately scooped and bagged it.

ASTRO BOY Japan may soon begin working on a real life Astro Boy. Japanese researchers have proposed a plan to build a robot with the physical, mental and emotional faculties of a five-year-old. Costing roughly $425 million a year for 30 years, the government-funded plan would be named "Project Atom" after Osamu Tezuka's *Tetsuwan Atom*, a.k.a. *Astro Boy*.

ASTRO BOY

KAIJU BIG BATTEL Finally, the epic battle between city-crushing monsters and menacing alien beasts that sold out arenas across the country is coming to your TV. From Redline Entertainment, *Terebi Sento* collects the best fights of Kaiju Big Battel on a single DVD. American pro wrestling meets Japanese monster movies in this hour of non-stop wacky fun.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MONTH

MARMALADE BOY

MARMALADE BOY

Spouse swapping and stepsiblings falling in love might remind you of the '70s, but for thousands of anime and manga fans, it's just part of the zany fun that is "Marmalade Boy." At the Big Apple Anime Fest, TOKYOPOP gave fans a sweet treat when they announced that the "Marmalade Boy" DVD box set is close on the horizon. Coming in April, the three-disc collection will include 18 episodes of the twisted teen soap opera along with oodles of extra goodies.

NEW ADDITION

Del Rey, Kodansha launch manga line

With manga popularity on the rise and titles routinely cracking bestseller lists across the United States, it was only a matter of time before one of the giants of book publishing took notice.

The first major company to jump on the manga bandwagon is Del Rey, an imprint of Random House known mainly for its science fiction and fantasy publications. The company recently struck a deal with Kodansha, one of the largest manga publishers in Japan, to release several of their titles in the American marketplace.

Del Rey has cherry-picked four Kodansha titles to start their manga launch in May 2004. First out of the gate will be *XXXHolic* and *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle*. *Gundam SEED*, a manga adaptation by Masatsugu Iwase of the latest Gundam anime and *Negima*, a new series by *Love Hina* creator Ken Akamatsu will follow soon after.

Del Rey's background as a major player in book publishing will allow them to compete with other American manga publishers, says Del Rey Director of Manga Dallas Middaugh.

"The main difference between Del Rey and these smaller companies is decades more experience," Middaugh said. "We've had relationships for years with other buyers, which means more opportunity for us."

Middaugh does not foresee Del Rey's relationship with Kodansha impacting other American manga publishers that license Kodansha titles, aside from creating more options for manga fans.

"Del Rey does not have 'first look' on new titles," Middaugh said. "But we are new competition for titles. We are not a licensor, we're a cross-publisher."

While Del Rey will not have exclusive rights to all the Kodansha titles, they will be providing readers with something that can't hurt: more manga in the U.S. marketplace.

"We're trying pick out what we think the top titles are," Middaugh said. "And we're going for quality over quantity." ■ **ZAC BERTSCHY**

DEL RAW *Gundam SEED* will be one of the first manga titles released as part of Del Rey's manga line. Others include *XXXHolic*, *Negima* and *Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicle*.

HOTIMPORTS

MANGA

OH MY GODDESS! TRAVELER (Dark Horse Comics) Something's wrong with Earthly goddess Belldandy's powers, and Keiichi's motorcycle club just dropped off some junk for them to store. The house is suddenly cramped, but it's Skuld to the rescue with a machine that can alter space! $17.95

HANAUKYO MAID TEAM VOL.3 (I.C. Entertainment) Yashuma Sanae has rejoined the Hanaukyo security team after training in another country, but she's jealous of how close Taro and Konoe have become. So while they're out on a trip for physical training, she tags along to keep an eye on the pair! $12.95

DARK ANGEL VOL. 1 (Central Park Media) Destined for greatness, Dark is a young man who must first overcome his fears and many beasts before he can assume the role of magical guardian of his land! $9.99

ANIME

MILLENNIUM ACTRESS (Dreamworks) Two men interview an aging film star in this tale from Satoshi Kon, director of "Perfect Blue." But as they get wrapped up in her life story, they have to wonder if the images they see are real or imagined! $29.98

MACROSS PLUS BOX SET (Manga Entertainment) Guld and Isamu have grown up together as perpetual rivals. But when a childhood friend returns to their lives, the two experimental Valkyrie pilots begin to compete in earnest! When the virtual idol Sharon Apple awakens and seizes control of all of Macross, the pilots must put their animosity aside to fight a common foe! $89.95

STEAM DETECTIVES VOLUME 2 (ADV Films) Orphaned boy detective Narutaki must thwart the evil mayhem of Crimson Scorpion, Baron Macine, Night Phantom and Dr. Guilty. Part mystery, part gothic thriller, this 125-minute DVD kicks adventure into high gear. $29.98

INCENTIVE OF THE MONTH

LOVE HINA: MOVIE BOX SET (BANDAI)

Keitaro tried (and failed) to pass the entrance exams for the prestigious Tokyo University to fulfill a promise with a lost childhood love. He thinks he may have found her. But rivals, schoolwork and his duties as the manager of the all-girl Hinata Apartments keep getting in his way. Finally collected in one convenient box set are all three "Love Hina" movies. With loads of interactive menus and crazy characters, these movies can't be missed! $59.98

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CPM MANGA

ANIME 101:

AZUMANGA DAIOH

Move over, Charlie Brown! "Azumanga Daioh," one of Japan's hottest anime is coming to American shores! And if the ridiculous fervor over the ADV series in Japan is any indication of how big it's going to be in America, then you can expect a smash hit. The series follows the decidedly bizarre adventures of six high school girls named Chiyo, Tomo, Osaka, Sakaki, Yomi and Kagura. These girls are unbelievably eccentric, and when they're tossed into some strange situations, the fireworks begin. Kagura repeatedly deals with a homicidal kitten, Chiyo suffers endlessly with swimming lessons and the incredibly competitive Tomo isn't good at anything. Over the course of the series, the girls bond and everyone learns a few lessons about growing up, but this is no after school special! Here are a handful of notes on what could be America's next anime phenomenon, "Azumanga Daioh"! ■ ZB

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BAREFOOT SERPENT

What does a first-grader have in common with superheroes like Batman and Spider-Man? Find out in this tale of death and ghosts.

THE DIRT *Barefoot Serpent* offers a tale that combines fact and fiction to penetrate the universal theme of loss and coping by mixing beautifully poignant images, wandering spirits and button-cute kids.

DOYA LIKE? If you dig the childlike innocence of *Akiko* and "dead people" films as diverse as "Field of Dreams" and "The Sixth Sense," then *Barefoot Serpent* will have you kicking off your shoes.

DIDJA KNOW? Because the story opens and closes with a look at acclaimed filmmaker Akira Kurosawa's life, writer/artist Scott Morse wanted to watch as many of his films as possible, which meant ordering imported versions of films not released in the U.S. over eBay.

WRITER: SCOTT MORSE
ARTIST: SCOTT MORSE
PUBLISHER: TOP SHELF PRODUCTIONS

What does a little girl on vacation in Hawaii have in common with Spider-Man, Batman and one of the world's most legendary filmmakers? They've all been forced to tackle the same villain: despair.

Whether it's Uncle Ben, Thomas and Martha Wayne or director Akira Kurosawa's beloved brother, everyone from four-color characters on paper to Hollywood heroes has dealt with loss. In Top Shelf's *The Barefoot Serpent* graphic novel, Scott Morse (*Elektra: Glimpse and Echo*, *Soulwind*) lends his fledgling heroine, who's suffering from the death of her older brother, a little help from creatures both worldly and otherworldly.

"In comics, specifically superhero comics, introducing loss into the world of a hero makes that larger-than-life character a bit more human," explains Morse. "It's an age-old device that people can relate to on a very basic human level, as everyone will deal with it in one form or another throughout their lives."

The Barefoot Serpent hits the ground running with brilliantly painted, full-page splashes of Akira Kurosawa growing up, learning the art of filmmaking and dealing with the suicide of his own brother, Heigo. It then relays the baton to an unnamed youngster on vacation with her parents as they all attempt to cope with the sorrow of losing a loved one in their own separate fashion. The anonymity of *The Barefoot Serpent*'s cast allows the story to swallow readers whole, forcing them to look through the characters' eyes and experience their emotional highs and lows.

"Everyone goes through stages of not feeling great about life, and I wanted readers to be able to take something away from the book," Morse says. "The more they can relate to the book the better, so I tried to open it up as much as I could."

However, instead of grieving together, the family's depression splits them apart. The father slumbers lazily on the beach, drowns his sorrows with a little Maui Schnapps from the bar and accosts a painter who claims to see his dead son, while the mother hops on a moped to speed away from her sadness, encountering a dog who allowed her own pup to die. Left alone, the little girl wanders into the forest, lured by the sound of drums, but discovers the tune is emanating from a supernatural source—the dreaded "Night Marchers," souls of the dead from Hawaiian myth who walk to the sea to enter the netherworld!

To look one of their rank in the eye means certain death, but even without that grisly knowledge, the little girl's instincts are strong enough to make her beat feet in the opposite direction. Her rapid retreat sends her into a clearing where she meets a young Hawaiian boy carving a ceremonial mask. Following him home, the bickering duo wind up transforming the little girl's grief into hope as she is finally able to properly say goodbye to her sibling, who reappears briefly as a sort of

EYE FOR SAMURAI *The Barefoot Serpent*, is bookended with an autobiographical look at Akira Kurosawa, director of "The Seven Samurai."

DRUMS OF THE DEAD These Night Marchers may look cute, but watch out—to look them in the eye means certain death!

specter. When the family reunites at the end of the day, they realize that a little time apart was just enough to show them how important they are to one another.

Hope was always a prevalent theme in Kurosawa's films, but this, and the parallel of losing a sibling to suicide, is not the only link between his life and the little girl's. Morse peppers *The Barefoot Serpent* with a variety of subtle references to Kurosawa's movies as homage to the inspirational filmmaker, turning the tale into an Easter egg hunt for movie aficionados.

"I want people to draw conclusions from [*Barefoot Serpent*] and try to see how many different parallels they can make from it—but not be like, 'Oh, look how tricky Scott was being,'" says Morse. "I want people to realize you can combine fiction and reality and comics is the perfect medium for it. You can get something completely new." (In case you're curious, Morse includes a special director's commentary page at the end detailing which scenes were plucked from Kurosawa's movies.)

If you're ready to embark on a life-altering vacation to the Hawaiian Islands, and don't mind learning a thing or three about one of the world's most prominent filmmakers, then climb onto *The Barefoot Serpent* and slither your way through Scott Morse's most ambitious work to date.

THE LAST WORD *The Barefoot Serpent* coils around you and squeezes—but you'll be too hooked on the stunning imagery, poignant story and characters so genuine you'll swear you've met them to even try and squirm out of its grip. ■ **TODD CASEY**

WANNA PICK UP THIS SERIES?

Call 1 888 COMIC-BOOK to find your nearest comic shop, or visit www.topshelfcomix.com to order directly. Do you know about a cool series that deserves the "Secret Stash" treatment? Write to us at "Secret Stash," c/o Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY 10920, or e-mail us at secretstash@wizarduniverse.com.

INDYBUZZ

SEAMONSTERS & SUPERHEROES What's left after you've written about WWI heroes, undead rednecks and space-obsessed scientists? Seamonsters and superheroes, of course!

A three-issue mini-series published by Slave Labor Graphics, *Seamonsters & Superheroes* collects short strips by Scott Mills, the Ignatz Award-winning cartoonist behind *Trenches, Zebediah the Hillbilly Zombie* and *The Masterplan*. Ranging from silly to serious, the all-new stories star love-struck sea captains, super-powered screw-ups and even Mills himself. If you're looking for smart comics that won't make you depressed and funny comics that won't make you stupid, don't miss the first issue, hitting shelves in November. $2.95, **www.slavelabor.com**

RUMBLE ROYALE Grrls just wanna rock out...with mutants! Post-apocalyptic fem-rockers are just one element you'll find in *Rumble Royale*, an anthology published by the Royal Academy of Illustration and Design. Monster cops, zombie cowboys and hungry ninjas burst out of the collection. Look for an *Infinite Kung Fu* story (a previous "Secret Stash" pick) by Kagan McLeod. $9.95, **www.steve-tastic.com/raid**

SOULWIND If *Barefoot Serpent* sounds like your cup of tea, don't miss Scott Morse's *The Complete Soulwind* from Oni Press this month. A 520-page awe-inspiring opus, the graphic novel collects Morse's epic exploration of myth, religion and art into a single hefty volume for the first time. $29.95, **www.onipress.com**

MAX HAMM Snow White has disappeared, and if Detective Max Hamm doesn't find her soon, there'll be the piper to pay! *Fables* meets film noir with a comic twist in the second volume of *Max Hamm: Fairy Tale Detective*, a three-issue series by Frank Cammuso about one hardboiled little piglet taking on the seedy underbelly of Storybookland. $4.95, **www.cammuso.com**

DEMO Could you live an ordinary life with superpowers? Writer Brian Wood and artist Becky Cloonan (the creative team behind *Channel Zero: Jennie One*) explore the real-world implications of superpowers in *Demo*, a 12-issue monthly series from AiT/PlanetLar. Each issue tells a self-contained story about an individual's struggle with abilities beyond those of mortal men. $2.95, **www.ait-planetlar.com**

THE FIXER War: what is it good for? Answer: warlords looking to make a quick buck. In this graphic novel published by Drawn and Quarterly, comics-journalist Joe Sacco (*Safe Area Gorazde*) exposes the gangsters who profited from conflict in the Balkans and the Bosnian government that fails to prosecute them 10 years after the war. $24.95, **www.drawnandquarterly.com** ■ **DAVE MARSHALL**

WHO IS 2003'S MAN OF THE YEAR?
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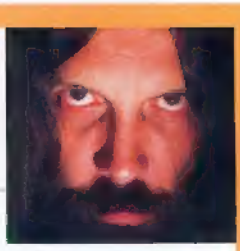
14 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT ALAN MOORE



1. MOORE WAS EXPELLED from school in 1971, at the age of 17, which—he says—is when his education really started. School, he says, was a place in which children were bound to study a "covert curriculum" based on punctuality, obedience and "the acceptance of monotony."

2. 'SOPRANOS' MEETS 'HAMLET'? Moore admits to being hooked on HBO's "The Sopranos," which—because of its incredible characterization and "terrific" writing—he likens to Shakespeare.

3. DID YOU KNOW Moore started out as an artist? Yep, his first big break in comics was as a cartoonist (under the pseudonym of Curt Vile) for a weekly British magazine called *Sounds*.

4. BANNED FROM THE USA? When Moore wrote a CIA expose in the late 1980s with artist Bill Sienkiewicz titled *Brought to Light*, the project gave rise to speculation that the CIA banned the writer from re-entering the United States. (Moore described said speculation as "rubbish" and explained he simply doesn't have a passport.)

5. TALK ABOUT SURREAL Moore's daughter took an English course at university for which she had to study works by, you guessed it, Alan Moore. (*V for Vendetta* and *Watchmen* both appeared on the syllabus.)

6. ALAN MOORE, ACTIVIST? Not only was he involved with both Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League, he created a magazine called *AARGH* (Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia) that, with contributions from the likes of Frank Miller, Dave Gibbons and Neil Gaiman, raised more than $10,000 for a gay and lesbian organization.

7. EXPERIENCING VERTIGO, indeed. As a creator whose work on DC's *Swamp Thing* sparked the publisher to create a mature readers line, Moore has described Vertigo as a recurring reminder of "a bad mood I was in 10 years ago."

8. 'WATCHMEN' REMAINS A DISAPPOINTMENT. While he knows it's a seminal work in the industry (he's admitted thinking "No one's going to be able to follow this"), Moore in some ways laments its effect on comics. "I'd have liked to have seen more people trying to do something that was as technically complex as *Watchmen*, or as ambitious, but which wasn't strumming the same chords that *Watchmen* had strummed so repetitively."

9. BEST BATMAN STORY EVER? Not *Batman: The Killing Joke*, according to Moore. While fans cite it as a classic, Moore doesn't feel it's a very good example of his work: "It's not saying anything very interesting in terms of my writing. Brian Bolland's artwork is beautiful, though, and—on its own—is well worth the cover price."

10. NAME THAT CHARACTER Upon realizing he'd had Robert Louis Stevenson's Mr. Hyde kill Emile Zola's Nana on Edgar Allan Poe's Rue Morgue locale in *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* Vol. I #1, Moore decided that every character named in *League* would be tied to an existing fictional individual or be a back-engineered ancestor of another.

11. THE BEST COMIC BOOK EVER? In Moore's opinion: *MAD*. He describes Harvey Kurtzman's satirical 1950s comic (later turned into a magazine) as a "unique" work.

12. 'BIG NUMBERS,' Moore's unfinished self-published comic from 1989-90, may be adapted for (and, in effect, completed on) television. Picture Palace Productions may use Moore's outline (he has it plotted on a sheet of paper the size of a tablecloth) to create a 12-episode TV series.

13. NO MOORE HOLLYWOOD. Moore, for reasons both professional and "fatherly," deliberately distances himself from film adaptations of his comics work. He's politely declined offers to participate, stating: A. He says he has no desire to write for Hollywood, and B. "If someone's going to butcher my baby," he says, "I'd rather it wasn't me."

14. AS FOR 'THE BEARD,' the signature facial feature that's become synonymous with his name, Moore attributes its continuing growth to one thing and one thing alone—the fact he can't be bothered to shave. ■ CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE

RORSCHACH TEST Moore feels disappointed that no other comic has achieved a complexity like *Watchmen*.